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THE
VICAR'S COURTSHIP.

VOL. II.

THE
VICAR'S COURTSHIP.

BY
WALTER THORNBURY.

O zarte Sehnsucht, süßes Hoffen,
Der ersten Liebe goldne Zeit,
Das Auge sieht den Himmel offen,
Es schwelgt das Herz in Seligkeit—
O, dass sie ewig grünen bliebe
Die schöne Zeit der jungen Liebe !

SCHILLER'S *Lied von der Glocke.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE VICAR'S COURTSHIP.

CHAPTER I.

THE LODGINGS AT FONTFORD.

A DAY or two before the great archery meeting, which the Wiltshire papers had already announced side by side with the intelligence of the Honourable Fitzegbert Cantelupe's intention of putting himself forward as a candidate in the Whig interest for Bibury, Amy Robinson received, to her infinite surprise and delight, the following letter :—

“22, BUCKINGHAM STREET,

“October 18th, 1860.

“MY OWN DARLING AMY,—

“I am going to tell you something that I am sure will indeed startle you. I see your dear brown eyes open wider when you hear that dear papa and I are actually coming down to live for a year in Wiltshire. Yes, really. It is like a dream, is not

it? Well; Mr. Bassevi, whom we used to think so cruel, and who was always persuading papa to borrow money, and then forcing him to take furniture and cigars for it, and rubbish we didn't want, and then used to threaten him with prison and every horrible thing, has been so kind, and has engaged papa to paint some ceilings at Mr. Harker's and at the Honourable Mr. Cantelupe's at Swallowcliff Castle; and now, after this good news, I'm going to surprise you, dearest, still more. It's like a fairy story, isn't it? We have been trying to let the dear old house furnished, but could not hear of anyone, till that kind Major Donovan got us a tenant, a rich, very rich, Greek merchant, a M. Zenocrapolos; he is the importer of the Charlemagne Champagne that the major says the Prince of Wales and all the great Belgravian people are now insisting on having. He is to give us 14*l.* a year more than we pay, so it is not a bad bargain; and your dear, generous papa thought he could not give the good major less than 5*l.* (it was rather hard to part with) for his excellent management in the affair. The major is always talking of you, and says such beautiful things, quite like those you read in 'Lalla Rookh.' Papa said to him yesterday something about young Mr. Tilbury, the cheesemonger, that sued us, and who said that you were a true daughter of Eve.

‘Eve?’ says the major; ‘bedad, I think there’s more of the daybreak about her.’ There, Amy, there’s flattery to turn your little head. You’ll never have any lover pay you a more charming compliment than that, even if you live to be an old woman like me. Indeed, the major is very polite and kind, and often gets papa work. I only wish he had a little more strictness of principle; but he is always borrowing half-crowns and never thinks of them again, and you know we cannot afford that.

“Papa has just finished a wonderful replica for Mr. Bodger, the Royal Academician; but Mr. Bodger tells Mr. Bassevi he will not pay such large prices the next time. Now, dearest, as we come down on Saturday, will you look us out some small, neat, cheap lodgings at the nearest town to Summerleas. I was once, as I told you, in Wiltshire, when I was quite a child, and I think I shall like to see it again. I remember the broad downs and the fine air, and after being pent up in London, attending to lodgers, I shall quite enjoy it, if I don’t find it dull. Then we shall see you often, darling, and perhaps once in a way call and see all the wonderful grounds and gardens we have heard you talk of. Papa is just calling me to lay his palette and bring his brushes, and I must conclude; but first let us thank you, my own

dear child, for the 5*l.* you sent us so nobly from the quarter owing you before the holidays. How selfish and cruel it is of us to take it ! but yet how can we pay all the small bills without it, and the 5*l.* to the major left us rather bare. The major promises to come down and see us ; but he is very busy just now organising a new company to open up the old gold-mines that the Spaniards left unemptied in Central America. He is off there in the spring. He sends the most high-flown compliments. Papa sends his dearest love ; he's so longing to see you.

“I am, my own darling Amy,

“Your ever loving mother,

“JANE ROBINSON.”

“P.S.—We shall bring little Susan with us ; we shall be more independent then of the people of the house. I felt rather a pang in taking down the placard of ‘Apartments to Let,’ that we used to hopefully tie to the balcony ; and yet how bitter the disappointment used to be sometimes when we were very poor, and had no applications for two or three weeks. Yet to look back to those times, seems quite pleasant now. Your papa is busy painting and talking to the major, who is singing his favourite old song, ‘The Limerick Car-driver,’ so I steal back just to write a line more to my darling

child. I shall bring all your things. Papa's canvases and portfolios will make quite a business for me to pack. Good-bye. We shall meet soon. I shall be so proud to see you among all the grand people."

It was one of those pleasant ruffling days when sun and wind struggle together as if wrangling for the cloak of Æsop's traveller, that Amy took her way along the Abbey Terraces, the by-road to Fontford. The dry dead leaves blew before her in countless droves or circled in whirls like those summer cycles of dust that Scotchmen suppose to be little processions of "the good people." One would almost have thought that, as in the days of Una, innocence, virtue, and happiness had spells to win all things to their power. Amy moved so light and noiselessly, and with such fairy-like speed and gentleness over the close, crisp turf, that the jetty blackbird on the mossy bough of the great silver fir did not even stay his song as she passed by; the squirrel at the foot of the larch, only forty yards off, with his fore-feet raised against the trunk, turned his little quick head, but did not ascend; the wood-pigeon on the summit of the spruce murmured in its loving motherly way, but took no flight; the speckled thrush only glanced before her from bush to bush, as if to lead

her onwards to fresh depths of fairy land; the red-headed woodpecker uttered his harsh note like a dog's bark, not to startle but to welcome her; the little grey rabbit, whose knowledge of the big world dated back only three months, tripped leisurely across the terrace with no undignified confession of terror; even the wood violets did not tremble at the approach of her foot. One would almost have thought that all the animate and inanimate things about her path loved her and greeted her.

No wonder that Amy enjoyed that hour of hope and liberty. The Terraces were favourite spots of hers. It needed no artist's daughter to appreciate such a scene. The seven miles of terraces that traversed the Abbey domains were the plateaus partially levelled by art of huge scarped ramparts of chalk rising abruptly from the valleys. They were probably mere undulations of the bed of some bygone ocean; but they almost resembled the vast earthworks of some primeval race, their sides were so abrupt and their formation so regular. Perhaps down these descents, in spring purple with violets and in summer undulating with every sort of flowering grass, mailed Romans and half-naked Britons may have often rolled in the death lock. These terraces Mr. Staunton had crested with plantations of beech and fir. Dogwood, hazel, and wild cherry formed the undergrowth, that, fringed by

here and there a tall sable *lignum vitæ* or a spreading rhododendron, gave the plantation more of the look of a shrubbery than of a mere tract of wild neglected wood.

Once Amy, leaving the open terrace, struck a narrow path through the covert that led to a second smaller siding parallel with a loose mossy stone wall bordering the Abbey woods. Beyond lay open ploughed lands, where sable rooks, taking very open order, strutted with that portly air that such birds will assume after a heavy cold collation of worms. Three or four fields below ran the high road from Summerleas to Fontford. Looking down into the road just by a square old-fashioned house that had been pointed out to her as the house where the clergyman's daughter once lived who eloped with young Mr. Staunton, and which she therefore always regarded with a sort of girlish romantic interest, Amy saw a line of black figures moving along in a direction towards Fontford. It was the funeral of Mrs. Flower, which her step-son had had carried out on a most lavish scale. Latterly a great change had come over the head keeper. He was always driving about the country in a smart new dog-cart he had bought, and he had assumed the manner of a well-to-do gentleman-farmer, who would not brook opposition, even from his supe-

riors. That black line seemed to jar with the clear blue sky and the sunshine, and Amy turned again into the wood to avoid the sight, frightening up a pheasant as she did so. A moment afterwards she came to a rude thatched hut built by the Abbey keepers for their night watchings. It stood close to a broken part of the wall, and adjoined a thick brambly part of the covert. Amy ran by it, half dreading that some ferocious poacher would rush out of the darkness of the deserted hut. Then laughing at her own fears in such broad sunshine, she tripped back into the open terrace and walked briskly on till she came to an embattled viaduct above the bye-road, which there, turning abruptly to the right, led down into Fontford.

From this high pathway a beautiful country spread itself before Amy like a rolled out map. To the left, beyond the line of the terrace wood that ended abruptly on the very frontier of Dorsetshire, stretched downland in rolling blue undulations like the waves of a vast sea. There was nothing to break the grand monotony, freedom, and loneliness, but a windmill on the distant horizon, and a flock of sheep that speckled here and there the crop-eared turf. Down below, where the blue smoke blew north-westward from some hundred or two chimneys, clustered the village of Fontford. Immediately beyond its last

house the down rose again bare and wild as in the time of the Romans.

Fontford was a place between a town and a village, but with more of the village. One long dull street, with an ivy-towered church at one end, and a school-room at the other. It had returned a member to parliament in Pitt's time, and was one of the first ripe grains that fell before the Reform Bill's scythe-like clauses. Before that time a golden age had prevailed, when every voter in Fontford had always 40*l.* laid down on his door-step for his free and independent vote. It was a tradition that Mr. Staunton had once sent his butler to parliament, and that when the delighted butler had thanked the voters, they had told him not to think too much of it, for that if Squire Staunton had sent his Newfoundland dog, they'd have returned him.

Before Amy had entered Fontford three minutes, her coming was known to, and canvassed by, half the people of the not over-abundantly lively place. Trade not being vigorous in Fontford, nor driven on with that dangerous rapidity common elsewhere, the small tradesmen and artizans of the place had ample time to study the movement and demeanour of all strangers, and also of each other. The blacksmith striking the red-hot horse-shoe suspended the fall

of his hammer, and wondered who she was ; the tailor, cross-legged like a Turk, and shoeless on his board, discussed of her to his pale apprentice. A customer at the general shop pointed her out to the shopman ; sots saw her over the red curtain at the Harker Arms ; the worn-looking, pallid dressmaker next door gave her languid look of curiosity, and then bent her eyes again on the wearisome finery of some farmer's buxom daughter.

At the turning by the post-office, Amy came suddenly, to her great delight, upon the eldest Miss Chivers, who, calm and sensible as ever, was on her way to the dressmaker's.

"Oh, I am so glad to meet you, my dear," she said ; "and how have I been ? Well, I have had two days since I saw you of the most awful sciatica—could hardly crawl down stairs ; and poor May has been very unwell, too, and isn't even now able to come out. Well, and how are you, darling ? why, you look more charming than ever."

Amy poured forth her news. Papa and mamma were both coming down to live for a year in Wiltshire ; papa had great paintings to do at the Abbey and the Castle ; he had given up his house in Buckingham Street, and she was looking for lodgings.

When persons are happy, they wish to call all

the world together to share it. It is well the world is hard of hearing, for if it did come together at such appeals, its coldness would be sadly disappointing. Miss Chivers received the news with somewhat too great calmness. She had a vague notion of the social position of artists, and had rather a dread of a mother who had kept a lodging-house. Amy she delighted in, but she could not promise to swallow all Amy's relations, so she said,—

“Oh, indeed I am so glad. Well, dear, and where do you think of putting them?”

Amy did not know. She thought there might be rooms at the post-office, but papa must have a large airy room to himself for painting.

Miss Chivers looked up and down the street, and thought a few moments; then she said, taking one hand from her muff, and laying it impressively on Amy's shoulder,—

“I've thought of it; Lawson's—Lawson's will do. They are nice clean people, and have no young children; and as he is a carpenter, they have large lofts and sheds, which are just the thing.”

“I really think they would do; and how kind of you to think.”

“Let's go and see; but here's Mr. Cantelupe's drag coming. Oh, that young man, how fast he is driving to the dogs!”

A well-built London drag, with four horses, had just then swept round the corner of the Fontford road—no one inside; two smart top-booted grooms, with arms folded, as if in defiance of the world, were behind, and Mr. Cantelupe was on the box, dressed in a light grey wrapper, which was thrown open, and disclosed a light cut-away coat, with a red camelia in the button-hole. He manipulated the reins professionally, with hands cased in lavender kid gloves. The way in which he caught up his whip lash, and then launched it forth at the near leader, was a sight for Tattersall. He took off his outrageously fashionable hat when Miss Chivers bowed, but he fixed his eyes on Amy. A moment more, and the four bays had swept round the corner leading to the open down, across which the road to Bibury led.

Miss Chivers was rather flattered by the bow. "A very handsome fellow," she said; "and very like his uncle, Lord Mazagan, when he was younger. I do not myself see the pleasure of playing at stage coachmen, but I suppose it is a pleasure; these reckless young men, they'd drive engines if any one would ride in their trains, and they say he is going to marry Miss Harker. Well, it will be a very good match, though she is older than he is, and I'm sure I wish them happy with all my heart."

Mrs. Lawson's house was a small building, with four windows looking out on the street. The ladies were just knocking at the door when it opened, and out walked Dr. Briscoe and Mr. Goodrick, who had already met at the vicar's and become great allies.

"An unexpected pleasure," said the doctor, shaking hands with both. "Allow me to introduce a gentleman, who is to be a near neighbour of ours. Miss Chivers, Mr. Goodrick." (The doctor disdained to see-saw the names in the confusing conventional way.) "Miss Robinson, I think you told me, you have met before?"

Mr. Goodrick bowed gravely to Miss Chivers, and smilingly to Amy. "Miss Robinson," he said, "*I have* met before. It is not easy to forget such an event."

Miss Chivers was charmed, and smiled approval at Amy, as if part of the compliment devolved upon her. While the doctor was addressing himself more immediately to Miss Chivers, Amy mustered up courage, and said to the gallant old gentleman who stood beaming on her with an expression not cynical, but paternal, and glowingly benevolent,—

"Julia—I mean Miss Beauflower—told me that it is to your kindness I am indebted for my present situation. It is so strange that we should

meet down here. I am sure you will not think me—that you will pardon my not thanking you more warmly when you were driving me from Slobury.”

“My dear young lady,” said Mr. Goodrick, still holding the hand that he had shaken, “I am afraid you have little to thank me for. I am afraid the Harkers are not pleasant people; they are certainly not good enough for you. They seem purse-proud and offensive.”

“Oh, indeed, they are very kind——”

“Ah, you are too good; you shut your eyes, I fear, to their meanness and harshness. We must find you some nicer people than that, mustn’t we, doctor?”

“What are you talking about?—find what? Now, you have been five or six minutes there flirting outrageously with my especial flame, I know; then, to turn it off, you ask me some matter-of-fact question. Mr. Goodrick, you are an artful man.”

“All men are deceitful,” said Miss Chivers, laughing; “and you, doctor, with all your pretended blunt honesty, you are as bad as the rest, every bit.”

Mr. Goodrick strongly denied flirting, and appealed to Amy, who was also earnest in her protestations.

“Who ever did own flirting?” said the doctor. Remember, Mr. Goodrick, I have a prior claim on Miss Robinson, and I shall bring an action for breach of promise, mind that.”

“Amy’s come over, doctor,” said Miss Chivers; “what do you think for?—now guess.”

“To ask you to the Archery Meeting.”

“No; I’ve been asked before.”

“Give it up. Is it a conundrum?”

“Conundrum? no! Amy’s come over to see about lodgings for her papa and mamma, who are coming to live for a time down in Wiltshire.”

“I am so glad. We want society here sadly.”

Society! thought Miss Chivers, with floating notions still of plumbers, glaziers, and char-women.

“Are Mrs. Lawson’s rooms spacious enough?” said the doctor.

“They’re the very thing,” said Miss Chivers; “but I am sure we shall frighten poor Mrs. Lawson if we go in in such a strong body.”

“A decided hint for the two gentlemen,” said the doctor, “to make themselves scarce. Oh, I know the ways of you ladies. Come, let’s go. They want to see about, and go all over the house, as if they’d got a search warrant, and eventually they’ll go somewhere else. That’s their women’s

plan, Mr. Goodrick. Come ; we old bachelors are in the way."

"I have not the honour, doctor, of being an old bachelor," said Mr. Goodrick, smiling ; "I am a widower."

"Widower or bachelor, they don't want us. They want to torture poor Mrs. Lawson about the rent and the washing, and a thousand things, price of coals, age of grown-up children, and so on."

"It's nothing of the sort. You men are just as curious as we women are," retorted Miss Chivers, gallantly. "I meant what I said. We should overpower poor Mrs. Lawson. Oh, you always must have your fun, doctor."

"Good-bye, Miss Chivers. I leave my character behind me."

"It's quite safe in our keeping."

"Good-bye, Miss Robinson. Don't let Miss Chivers abuse me too much."

Amy promised to consider herself retained for the defence, and shook hands with the doctor and Mr. Goodrick.

"And now that tiresome man is gone, Amy, let us see what Mrs. Lawson says."

Mrs. Lawson had two rooms, a sitting-room and a bed-room, and very neat, clean, and pleasant they were for their size. The view of the main streets of Fontford was perfect.

“Could she find any place where Mr. Robinson could paint?”

Mrs. Lawson looked slightly aghast.

“What sort of paints? Furniture? varnishing? graining?”

“No; painting historical pictures for the Abbey. Mr. Robinson was an eminent artist.”

Oh, yes; she now understood. She thought there was a back room of the shop that would be just the thing, with a stove in it, as it got colder; or they had a loft, but there was no window in that. Would they like to see the room behind the shop? There was rather a vagueness, an intellectual haziness about Mrs. Lawson's notions of Mr. Robinson's professional employments; nor was Miss Chivers quite in the full light either. Amy, certainly, would like to see the studio, for, poor girl, in her mind the poor drudge of a low, half-Jew picture dealer was a Raphael and Michael Angelo combined, with aspirations stretching from St. Paul's to the top of Chimborazo. What an enchanter Love is; like the moonbeam, it throws a magic light over the meanest object as well as the grandest—on wild deer and tame donkey, on the Alps and on the dunghill. In her innocence and freshness of heart, Amy possibly believed that Miss Chivers was awe-struck at the professional dignity of her father, and eager to make

his acquaintance ; whereas Miss Chivers was at that moment quietly thinking what was the fewest times she could possibly ask the probably objectionable people to tea. How good it was of Nature not putting our hearts outside us in crystal cases. What a strange world it would be when there was no fighting behind walls, and all one's enemies were enemies in the open !

One peculiarity of Mrs. Lawson's family was that there was always in the kitchen a full-grown son or a married daughter just come for the day. Therefore it was that as the two ladies passed the door of the culinary department a tall, handsome young woman and a rather sheepish-faced overgrown gowk, with an obtrusive, bulging sky-blue scarf, stood up, and "made obeisance," as the poor call it, in a respectful way.

"My son Willy and his wife, from Warminster," Mrs. Lawson said, with a sort of marginal reference to the fact.

The exploring party having passed the equator, which was the kitchen, now emerged in a paved yard behind the house, and scattering some alarmed fowls, who were as frightened as if they had never been in any society but their own, reached the shop, out of the open folding-doors of which some curls of deal shavings were blowing.

In that long apartment, filled with benches,

Mr. Lawson, a civil, chirpy man, with an apple-john face, was busy planing the planks from which the shavings had just regained their liberty. Mr. Lawson wore a square brown-paper cap, that cheapest of all useful articles of costume, and his apprentice, a hearty young fellow, was sharpening a chisel on a Turkish hone. A healthy smell, but not bottled for fashionable use as yet by Rimmel, pervaded the shop, which was ankle-deep in odorous shavings and sawdust, that waste material as yet almost unutilised by art. He wished the ladies a very good morning, and made a sensible but not strikingly original remark on the weather. An early glass or two had made Mr. Lawson chirpy, but not chirpier than usual, the hour following "Bever." Mrs. Lawson was, however, obviously a little nervous at his over-chirpyness, and tried to abate him by a rather sharp, overruling manner, and by telling him very drily and briefly what was wanted.

"I know, I know, Eliza," he said; "and I ought to know, for my father was the best grainer in Salisbury—was generally considered so, at least, in the Close. I'll show the ladies the room as we have at their disposal."

"Don't you leave your work, Frederick."

"Yes, but I will leave my work, Lizah. I know what's due to ladies like Miss Chivers and

Miss Robinson ; and, please God, my dooty I hope to do in the way which it shall please God to call me. John, go on with that dovetailing, I'll be back directly, and don't hammer while I'm talking. Do ye hear ? It ain't respectful in an apprentice, whatever his calling be ! ”

The inner room was large and lofty, with a long, latticed window that looked out on the garden. It had been a coach-house of a fly proprietor a long time ago, and since that a wash-house, and there was a copper still at one end.

“ There,” said Mr. Lawson, throwing out his bare arm ; his shirt-sleeves were rolled up. “ There's the place, and your father, Miss Robinson, is as welcome to it—(What's the rent to be, Lizah ?—Oh, fourteen, good !)—welcome to it as the flowers in May. Excuse my walking rather unsteady : it's the rheumatiz in my knees—furniture—any sort of painting or graining he can do here all to issel ; and if he ever wants a glass of beer, he's only got to call out, and my boy John will run for it to the Harker Arms ; which he knows the way.”

There was very little doubt from Mr. Lawson's loquacity that John did know the way. Mrs. Lawson consigned her husband back to his bench as soon as possible, and the negotiation soon concluded, for Amy was too unsuspecting to drive a

bargain, and Mrs. Lawson overthrew Miss Chivers at once on the item of *coals* and attendance.

“Fourteen shillings a week is what Mr. Baker (a shopman at Bailey, the draper’s) paid,”—and to that she referred, as lawyers quote Tidd and Blackstone, or High Churchmen the fathers—“fourteen shillings a week, not including washing, use of kitchen fire, or attendance. Boot cleaning the only other extra—yes, boot cleaning and the use of the piano.”

Amy having discovered the piano to be a mere cupboard, and destitute of two notes in every octave, with great promptitude proposed to cancel that item. Agreed. The treaty was finally drawn up, and the whole weekly payment put down at sixteen and sixpence, not including washing. Amy left delighted, with Miss Chivers, who was smilingly self-confident that without the aid of her experience the lodgings would have been twice as expensive, and that Amy would never have had the painting-room thrown in. Even small illusions help to make life bearable; without those greater ones, love, hope, ambition, who would care to live an hour?

CHAPTER II.

THE ARCHERY MEETING.

THE eventful day had come that Mrs. Harker had resolved was to render secure the future alliance of the houses of Harker and Cantelupe, and to make the grandson of the future Lord Mazagan the heir of fifteen miles of good Wiltshire land.

Countless money had been expended on the event. Two white marquees, one striped with blue and the other with pink, had been erected in a broad well-mowed meadow that lay under the Abbey terraces, and between the gardens which were detached from the house and the Inigo Jones's archway where Travers lived. By a flight of fancy to which they were indebted to Amy's quick and lively invention, the one tent bore the flag of England, and the other the tricolor of France. It was to be a small Field of the Cloth of Gold in miniature. The space was close mown and well rolled, and everything was

ready, even to the Duke of Downshire, who, having played hide-and-seek with the gout for six weeks, had got well just in time to present the chief prize—good, kind creature—although he would have to take the train that very afternoon and attend a meeting of the alarmed Conservative party at Lord Derby's early the next day. Nothing can be so agreeable as a false managing and fashionable—or would-be fashionable—woman, when all goes exactly as she wishes. She literally skates over the world, slides down the path of fashion radiant as a sunbeam. So among her assembling guests that day slid Mrs. Harker.

Lord Mazagan had just come, and the Duke was expected every moment. . Lord Mazagan was a gallant, made-up young old man, of the Palmerstonian type,—a thin, wiry, middle-sized sham person, affecting a youthful jaunty style of dress, spite of scanty hair and full wiry grey whiskers. You could mark the period when he ceased to adapt himself vigorously to modern fashions by his stiff upright collars and his cascade stock fastened by a large carbuncle. He was a hunting man when the gout would let him. He was also a Whig of the old school, that is, a believer in clique government, and his sympathies with the working man and labourer were about equal to

those of a Jesuit's with Garibaldi. In a word, he was a pleasant, flippant, gay, insincere old impostor, living on respectable terms of fashionable indifference with his wife, meeting her not unfrequently at other people's houses; still with the ordinary world and the county a very popular man, ready to join in anything that the majority liked, and calmly watching with selfish indifference the nephew who was to succeed him in the title "coming to grief" at one of the earliest fences on "the primrose path." Attired in a cut-away coat, buttoned over the chest, rather light trousers, with a bunch of Russian violets in his button-hole, and the most immaculate Magenta-coloured kid gloves, Lord Mazagan, shrewd and debonair, looked the very man who ought to keep a pack of fox-hounds, but leaves it to a nephew to incur the expense. It was indeed generally supposed in his part of Wiltshire that Lord Mazagan, having no children, regarded the aberrations of the Honourable Fitzegbert Cantelupe with a quiet but still rather malicious satisfaction. If the young Honourable was thrown, it was pretty clear to everybody that Lord Mazagan would not pick him up; nor did this gay old nobleman's selfish, but good-natured and sensible wife, either convey by her manner much promise of future aid in an emergency. As a professed

ladies' man, Lord Mazagan was, however, an immense acquisition at a party, and Mrs. Harker made great play with him.

It was half-past one, and the Duke had not yet arrived. Things began to look serious. Days were short now. Mr. Harker reconnoitred the road to Fontford with anxious eyes. In the meantime Miss Harker, the crack shot of the day, was explaining to Mr. Cantelupe and a group of her special adherents, the respective merits of "self-bows" (bows made of one piece of wood) and "backed bows" made of yew and hickory, illustrating her statements by stringing and unstringing her own bow, which was an old "Kensal," which enabled her to throw herself into some very graceful and Dienesque attitudes, much to the loud whispered admiration of her coterie. She had also read aloud, after much pressing, the register of her last week's shooting, which proved her success to be infallible. The chief prize, a regal brooch of remarkably fine brilliants and opals, was already as good as hers. It would be for her mercifully to allow others to contend for the other prizes, a chased silver bracelet, and a gold arrow with ruby and emerald feathers.

It must be confessed that even a prejudiced spectator would have found something to admire in Miss Harker's costume, though it was perhaps

just a little theatrical and over-done. She wore a green belted jacket lapelled like a man's coat, but with green silk, and a skirt of fine green, a shade darker than the jacket. A grey deer-stalker, with stiff scarlet feathers slanting to the top, gave her bold, hard face a jaunty amazonian-look by no means unbecoming. Quiver at her side, bracer on her left arm, tassels at her belt, and shooting-glove on, she looked a very Belphebe, dangerous to all susceptible men who admired style more than modest grace, and "go" more than the frank purity that still distinguishes the true unsophisticated English girl before her freshness and bloom have vanished in the heat, bad air, and the hardening competition, envy, and jealousy, of several London seasons. Self-confident, conscious of wealth and a certain cleverness, she moved a self-elected queen among the girls and matrons of all ages who surrounded her,—the tall, the short, the plain, the quiet, the fast, and the slow. Amy—Amy the flower of them all—was like a hidden primrose behind these flaunting dahlias, and moved unnoticed in the throng.

Amy had not even a bow—she did not intend to shoot; on reflection she had so decided, although latterly her practice had been steadily improving, especially in a slight breeze, the

effects of which she had amused herself and Ethel by studying. She was devoting herself to Miss Chivers, whose old-fashioned dress and largish bonnet gave her rather an incongruous appearance amid such a bed of tulips. Ethel was engrossed with Julia Beauflower and two girls dressed in black of about her own age, daughters of the Rector of Fontford, who had lately died. The Honourable Fitzegbert, looking tall, tawny, and handsome in his well-cut dress, was strolling from group to group with a recurrence, perhaps scarcely accidental, to Amy, and some very loud-talking dashing girls near her, to whom Beauflower was talking.

Lord Mazagan was taking the most gaily affected interest in Miss Harker's equipment.

"'Pon my soul," he said, "I daresay I'm a stupid—awfully stupid creature, but I can't see any difference in what you call the bobtailed arrow from any of the others. Now frankly, can you, Harker?"

Harker thought there was a difference, but could hardly tell where it lay.

"Oh, papa! how can you be so blind? Don't you see the feather on the arrow is bobtailed?"

Lord Mazagan put up his gold double eyeglass, and declared,—

"It really is! Oh, yes, so it is! Extraordinary I didn't see it at a glance."

"These are barrel-shaped arrows, you see," said the fair archer, "thicker in the middle; then the points differ in shape."

"Awfully interesting," said my lord, who seemed positively thirsting for knowledge, and ready like Cato to begin Greek at sixty.

Mr. Goodrick was discoursing to Dr. Briscoe, who had been pressing Amy to compete, but without effect, on the old English archery. The doctor wanted to know whether Robin Hood could really shoot a mile, split a willow wand or his adversary's arrow.

"Not he!" said Mr. Goodrick, who was prepared even on this out-of-the-way subject; "bah! all brag and lies; bows are a foot shorter now and arrows ten inches; even three hundred yards is tremendous shooting. You'll see these ladies presently; half the arrows will go anywhere, and all to the left, just as rifle bullets have a tendency to the right. There is no real accuracy over a hundred yards."

"England would be a fling, but for the crooked stick and grey goose wing," said the doctor, rubbing up his memory.

"All nonsense; they used eagles' and peacocks' feathers, but turkeys' are best. One thing, how-

ever, is certain, that the old archers used heavier arrows, for these shafts here would never penetrate well-tempered plates of Milan steel."

"One thing I cannot understand very clear," said Miss Chivers to Amy. "I know I'm a stupid old thing, but how do the shots count?"

"Oh! it's so simple," said Amy; "it's one for the white, three for the black, five for the blue, seven for the red, and nine for the glorious gold—that's the bull's eye. I got two golds yesterday in three shots; wasn't that nice? I do best when there is wind."

"Oh, I see," said Miss Chivers, ruminatingly, having already quite forgotten the relative value of the rings. The facts had evaporated, all but the one fact, that the gold was the best.

"Good gracious, how pale mamma looks!" said Miss Harker, as Mrs. Harker suddenly stepped from one of the marquees with an open letter in her hand.

"Oh, such a disappointment—dear, dear, how unfortunate," said Mrs. Harker, in vain trying to conceal her chagrin. "His Grace is obliged to go off this morning to Windsor. Council called sooner than he expected—great regret. And now I have come to ask you, my lord, to do us the honour of presenting the prizes on this occasion."

"I shall have the sincerest pleasure," said the

gay young-old lord. Then drawing Mrs. Harker mysteriously aside, he said, "Will you do me the favour of telling me who that very charming girl is talking to that old bird in the hideous bonnet. She is not one of the Chetwynds—eh? She is indeed really most charming."

Mrs. Harker's face visibly chilled, and a slight fog of chagrin rose over it.

"That girl," she said, drily, "why, that is our governess. Yes, she is very well, but she is spoiled by that dreadful English *mauvaise honte*."

"*Mauvaise honte* or not," thought Lord Mazagan, "Fitzegbert is making great play with her; and 'pon my word I don't wonder at it."

A slight wind had sprung up, a nor'-wester, that sent the brazen varnished beech-leaves sweeping over the range. It made Miss Harker rather cross, for she did not shoot so well when there was wind. Presently the brass band began in the English tent, relieved at intervals by a rifle band in the other tent, and the competitors took their places. There were eleven ladies on either side. There were to be fifty arrows shot at sixty yards and forty at fifty yards. The shooting was to commence at sound of the bugle.

A constant arrival of carriages—the continuous grinding of the gravel under whose wheels had long been heard—had now filled the meadow with

half the beauty and fashion of Wiltshire. The servants, too, and some of the country-people, chiefly women and children, and several of the farmers and local tradesmen, including Farmer Brown, Mr. Pitts, the Lawsons, the landlord of the Peal of Bells, &c., had been allowed to seat themselves on the lower slope of the terrace on steps cut for them in the turf and covered with carpeted planks. The notion of this section of the spectators was of the vaguest.

"Well, I do like to see bow-arrow shoot, they flies so pretty," observed Mrs. Brown.

"It's all nice enough," said her worthy husband, "but I don't believe that any one of them girls would ever kill a Frenchman if she were to fire away from now till next Warminster Fair."

It may be necessary to observe that by Frenchmen the honest farmer did not mean Gauls, but crows, who were much more his enemies.

Foremost among this section of the spectators, and close to the grooms and one or two gardeners, stood Travers, who was talking to Mr. Pitts with patronising arrogance, as if the whole meeting had been got up for his sole amusement. Mr. Harker, conscious that the man's eye was on him, avoided looking that way, feeling in him a nightmare that made the very sunshine darkness.

In the meantime every form of nervous pe-

dantry prevailed among the competitors. There were discussions as to the strength of their bows, whether under or over fifty pounds, the weight of arrows, the style of loosing, the way of aiming, the Belgian bow-strings and Meyler targets. Miss Harker, who was a theorist, was great upon aiming, and had pins arranged on her left-hand glove to guide her as to the elevation. There are just such pedants in rifle-shooting, pragmatic prigs, who do nothing without their wind-gauges, small telescopes, powder-funnels, and such pedantic paraphernalia, which are despised by the true eye, firm hand, and steady nerve.

The bugle was just about to sound when it was discovered that one of the French eleven, a Miss Ada Bennett, of Motcombe, had not come.

"Is there no one, my dear sir, who can take her place?" said Lord Mazagan to Beauflower, who happened to be next him. "This is really very serious—a very serious obstacle indeed. It seems a pity to remove one of the English eleven; and yet, my dear Mrs. Harker, I really see no other remedy."

"There is a young lady here," said Dr. Briscoe, kindly urging forward Amy, whose hand he held, "who, Ethel tells me, Mrs. Harker, is by no means an unskilful shot in private. She will, I'm sure, oblige the French party."

Mrs. Harker looked by no means pleased at this mode of loosing the knot.

"She has no bow, and is hardly properly equipped."

"Oh, mamma," cried Ethel, bursting forward, "I can run and get Miss Seymour's bow that she left here last week; and Amy does not use bracer or belt, and as for gloves, any old glove will do."

Mrs. Harker was carried away in the applause of several dozen more or less silvery voices, and Amy, whose face wore a beautiful flush, was duly chosen Captain of the French eleven in place of the missing miss. She took up her bow with quiet self-assurance, and resolved to do her best. The wind was fresher now, and she knew how to humour that capricious element. Ethel, in spite of a correction from her sister, was gambolling in triumph round Amy as she took up her position and sent her first arrow into the blue in a good line for the gold, and an inch nearer than Miss Harker's, which had been uproariously applauded.

"She has a good eye," said the doctor to Mrs. Harker, who made no reply, but turned to a lady next her.

"He that can shoot fayre," said Mr. Goodrick to the Vicar, "lacketh nothing but shootynge

straight and keeping of a length, whereof cometh hitynge of the mark."

"Oh, so you have read Roger Ascham?"

"I have, I confess."

"What is there you have not read?"

"Your modern poets."

"Ah, you should read the best of them."

"Not now. Well, at all events we are spared in women the tricks Ascham describes in Henry the Eighth's time—the hurry after the arrow, the lifting up one leg, the shouting, the swinging round the bow. These girls, you see, do this shooting as they are taught to do everything, in a restrained, conventional, entirely formal way—all exactly alike—as they ride, and dance, and play, and think—ugh! Sheep; yes, we're all sheep now, men and women."

The Vicar, being anxious to advise Julia, who was on the French side, had placed himself between her and Amy—a very pleasant neighbourhood. Cantelupe, after a faint attempt to keep himself on the side with which Miss Harker was shooting, had gradually sidled off to Amy's target, and was flirting vigorously with Julia Beauflower, of whose Beatrice-like sarcasms he had a wholesome fear, not unmingled with that sort of relish that men acquire for olives and other things at first unpala-

table till the taste has been educated for them. In the same group with Cantelupe stood Jack Talbot, a young Guardsman, his especial friend and adviser, a good-looking fellow, with a blonde mustache and a great deal of light hair. He had been brought by Cantelupe for the express purpose of asking his opinion of Miss Harker, and, what was equally important, of her father and her irrepressible and alarming mother. He was paying great attention to a dashing brunette, selecting her arrows and giving her advice as to the elevation. The result of the good and disinterested advice was not so satisfactory, however, as might have been wished, as the brunette's arrows generally went under or over the target, a fact which she satisfactorily attributed to the arrows being of a wrong kind of wood. But she was kindly consoled by Julia Beauflower, who, shooting recklessly, and with the sauciest indifference, somehow contrived to nail the target nearly every time, though never very near the gold. The French became much discouraged. Ethel, who alternated between the two camps, reported that Carry had been scoring like anything till the wind began to rise, and since then she had only got two reds in four shots.

“Vive la France!” cried Dr. Briscoe. “Miss Robinson has got a gold. Let's hurrah.”

It was Amy's first gold that day, so she was pleased when the folks and all her friends came round and congratulated her. Mr. Cantelupe declared it was awfully well aimed, and all her party began to applaud. She had allowed well for the wind, and given them a notion of how far to the right of the target to shoot. The words *awfully good* were used several hundred times on that occasion; and Amy looked very pretty as she became excited; the colour rose rather fuller to her cheek, and her clear grey eye sparkled with pleasure. Ethel stayed so long congratulating her that she had to be recalled rather sharply by her jealous sister, and sent to the house for another bow-string. Miss Harker had had two misses running.

"Vive la France!" again cried the doctor.

Miss Chivers and Julia were delighted. The Vicar, too, was warm in his congratulations, and that seemed to please Amy more than any of the others. Mr. Harker came round, gave a cold approval, and said with such a wind there was no knowing where the arrows would fall. Talbot, with the malicious intention of what he called "riling the old party," went round to Mrs. Harker and praised Amy's shooting.

"Awfully good," he said, stroking his mustache; "awfully good; that's a gold twice running. France will run you close, now."

“Pray don’t talk so, you good people there,” said Mrs. Harker, spitefully; “this is a most important moment in the contest. Ethel, don’t run about so, but keep near your sister and select the arrows for her.”

CHAPTER III.

GIVING THE PRIZES.

It was a pretty sight, the field under the Terraces at that moment. The wind considerably increasing, much to Miss Harker's vexation, and Amy's quiet satisfaction, blowing the rival flags out in azure and crimson streams. The two targets at each end, with their rings of motley colours, shone in the occasional sunlight like shields of ancient chieftains before the introduction of heraldry. The brazen leaves scattering across the range, gave life, animation and movement to the scene; the bells of Fontford, in the distance, were ringing a merry, hopeful marriage peal, recklessly defiant of all divorce courts. The young Amazons who were competing, flirting, laughing and chattering, had formed in pleasant and ever-varying groups round the targets nearest to the lake where Lord Mazagan and his nephew were the centre of noisy circles. The *oi polloi*, in the shape of grooms, keepers, footmen, coachmen and farmers, were

loudly discussing the chances of the contest, with strong predilections for Miss Amy, whose gentle, unassuming ways had won every one about the Abbey. "No pride about her," as Farmer Brown said, "and as good a girl as ever trod shoe-leather." Travers, far in advance of the rest, was loudly, very loudly expressing his opinion to the head groom and the farm bailiff—the latter a rough, red-faced man, who, having been a labourer once, was peculiarly severe to every one under him—that the whole business was a d—— piece of foolery, and that a little pigeon shooting would have been worth all the bow and arrowing he ever set eyes on. Travers had edged so near the target that Mr. Harker, who was discussing with Lord Mazagan Cantelupe's chance for Bibury, turned and frowned at him; but the head keeper returned the frown with a stare of insolent indifference, and, walking a little further from the target, lit an enormous cigar, and continued his conversation with all the calmness of a man of the world and an equal.

"Who is that man, Harker?" said Lord Mazagan, putting up his gold eye-glass for a moment, with slight surprise. "Isn't that your head keeper? Rather a free manner, eh?"

Mr. Harker's blood curdled.

"Yes," he replied, carelessly, "he has bad

manners, but he's an invaluable servant, and very careful of the pheasants."

"I hear he's a dead hand on the poachers. I wish my man, Parkinson, was half as good, but you're lucky in everything, Harker. We of the old stock are too conservative, and we are such bad men of business. So you really think Fitz has got a chance for Bibury?"

"If he stands I feel sure he will get in, but he may meet with formidable competitors."

"Oh, no; there's only young Bennet of Ridgway, and he has no position. Fitz will make the running."

Harker meditated. At that moment there was a moving off of the Amazons towards a third marquee, where a collation was laid out. They were waiting for the wind to go down. That was Mrs. Harker's notion.

"Come, my lord," he said, "let's join the ladies; my wife thought a glass of champagne would give a pleasant filip to the shooting. This wind has rather spoiled the affair. There is no certainty, such weather as this."

"Well, I thought that very pretty little—very charming little governess of yours shot extremely steady."

"Mere fluking; she's had no practice. That sort of slap-dash shooting away sometimes scores

wonderfully. You'll see my girl, now, when she really has it to do. It is really very uphill fighting; she has no one to back her, and she has hitherto been, perhaps, rather too contemptuous of her humble adversary."

"More fool she," thought Lord Mazagan; but he only said, "Outsiders will sometimes win when the best horse loses. Look how Fitz dropped his money on that favourite last year."

Mrs. Harker was especially polite to Mr. Goodrick, and as patronizingly familiar to the Vicar as he would permit her to be, for his defensive pride was always an armour he kept ready to slip on against such assailants; she was condescendingly kind to Miss Chivers. She also took excellent care so to manœuvre as to seat her eligible daughter next the eligible heir to a peerage. As for poor Amy, no one would have thought of her had not the Vicar secured her a place, and found for her, Julia, and the brunette Amazon, who was always lively and rattling, three places in the snugest corner of the tent, where he supplied them with the whitest wings of fowls, and a proper quantity of champagne; but Amy was obdurate, nothing would induce her to sip more than half a glass. The brunt of the contest was still to be borne, and her comrades were eager to have her opinion as to the best manner of loosing, aiming, and

other pedantic mysteries of the art, which they discussed in a pretty, mysterious conclave, quite away from their English antagonists. Amy, elected queen, and general as well of the well-fought field, gave herself no airs of sovereignty; she listened to the merest "muff" in her band, she had no secrets, she disowned all claims to wonderful eye or artful hand, she had read Ford's book with care, that was all. She preferred light arrows, and a bow not too heavy. She took care to select shafts perfect in the feathers. She was careful to loose steadily and sharply, and not let the arrow waver in the pulling; she disregarded the old warning dictum of keeping the target a little to the left of her knuckles. There was no infallible rule, she thought. It was necessary to study the different conditions of various shots. When in good shooting one felt where the arrows would go.

The brunette tapped her bow on the table and requested, "Silence, girls, for our captain." Ten pretty faces were stretching towards Amy; twenty bright eyes, a little brighter for the champagne, were fixed on her. This disconcerted Amy, who thereupon leaped up, and said,

"Oh, pray don't all look at me so. I've no more rules to give. I'm a mere beginner. What is the score, Julia?"

“English, 100 ; French, 86, and six more shots. I’m afraid we shall lose it.”

“Oh no, dear ; not if we all do our best.”

“Come, girls,” said the dashing brunette, “let’s have a trial arrow before they come out.”

At the other end of the table, Lord Mazagan was on his legs making a short speech about the whole business, and hoping that Miss Harker, the Maid Marian of the present occasion, would carry off the prize, to which her previous skill at many such festive meetings had so richly entitled her. He would not anticipate events, but he might say that the score showed that, in spite of all the skill and energy of the charming champions enlisted under the French banner, the jewelled brooch to be awarded by their hospitable, most hospitable host on the present occasion, was as securely Miss Harker’s as if it already sparkled on her breast. He heartily wished both sides success (laughter), but as that was impossible, he should rejoice in the victory (hear, hear) that would award so splendid and deserved a prize to so fair and skilful an archer. (Deafening applause.)

The shooting began again with great spirit ; every arrow drawn from the quiver was pruned with a loving care ; even Julia Beauflower discharged her shafts with less impetuosity and more success.

Her first two arrows actually pricked the target in the white, and her third was on the verge of the blue. The irrepressible brunette got two arrows in a fair line under the target, and one on the extreme edge to the left. Miss Harker, a little gayer but more severely scientific than ever, now arranged fresh pins in her glove, on a new and sure principle. The first three shots left the French party only ten behind, but their chances were small. The brooch already glittered before Miss Harker's greedy eyes. The rival competitors were so nearly equal—so equally bad, that is—that it was now quite evident, as no one else secured red or gold, that the contest lay between Miss Harker and Amy. The rival groups of France and England regarded each other with laughing defiance. Amy's friends were slightly depressed, quiet and very anxious; Miss Harker's partook of their leader's spirit, and were loud talking, arrogant, and rather crowing. Lord Mazagan eyed the target through his double eye-glass, and said, "Now for a gold." Mrs. Harker was repressing talking and questions, Mr. Harker attending to the scoring. Ethel, divided in interest, was watching Amy from a distance. Mr. Cantelupe, we regret to say, was whispering nonsense to a pretty, tall, gushing blonde who, being sister to a competitor, affected the most

sensitive and touching interest in every shot, but, being peculiarly short sighted, required Mr. Cantelupe to tell her exactly how the game went. Jack Talbot (longing for a cigar) was in the other camp stringing a bow for the brunette, who had always some part of her panoply hopelessly out of order, much to Julia's indignation.

There was a cheer from the French at Amy's fourth shot. She had got a red to Miss Harker's blue. She was steadier than ever now, point blank to the wind, and let the string go with exquisite steadiness.

"What is that cheer for?" said Miss Chivers to Mr. Goodrick, who was delighted with her. "I wish some good-natured person would tell us."

"Miss Robinson has made the best shot since lunch. Now, if she's a toady she'll fall off, and let the future peeress win."

"But she won't do anything of the kind. How dare you think such a thing possible? Amy is doing her very best—doing wonderful, isn't she, Dr. Briscoe? How hard and suspicious some people are!"

"One for us," said Mrs. Harker, with rather a nervous exultation, as her daughter drew her bow with extreme care and at a carefully chosen elevation, and the sounding arrow struck, quivering, full in the gold. The English gave a silvery shout.

"I congratulate you, Miss Harker," said Mr. Cantelupe. "By Jove! that's an A 1 shot. By Jove! it is. Just look, Talbot."

"First class," said the not enthusiastic Talbot. "I wonder if Robin Hood ever shot as well as that. Couldn't touch it, I should think."

"Now then, Amy, dear," said Julia, "now for one of your best shots. Don't go too much to the right; the wind's down now."

Amy said nothing, but, without turning to her friends, pulled true and firmly for a sound point-blank shot. The arrow left the string clear and sharp, and descended on the blue ring in a good line for the gold.

"We've no chance, Julia," she said, as she made way for the brunette; "but still we're nearly equal. If Miss Dobson gets even a white this time, we shall be only two behind. The English seem to forget we've been creeping up, though Miss Harker has beaten me. I feel very sure of the target now, but I must keep a little more to the right; the wind's increasing a little. I shall use my new arrows for these last two shots. Oh, I should so like to win."

"And I should so love to see you carry off the brooch, Amy. But just look at Miss Dobson; flirting to the last moment with that horrid man with the fair mustaches."

And so she was. Jack Talbot had offered a special arrow: she'd pulled it sharply from him, and he, artful fellow (pretending he was hurt), obtained her sympathy, and uttered some nonsense in a low voice about Cupid's arrows, by Jove, being ten thousand times sharper. But the brunette had, nevertheless, an eye to business, and did her best to hit the target, and she did so, too, to her great delight, on the very extreme edge of the blue. The French were just one ahead; still, with Miss Harker's superiority, the odds were two to one against them.

There was something about Amy's manner now that irresistibly drew the Vicar's eye to her. She was so quiet, resolved, and unpresuming; no sharp words, like Miss Harker, for the careless and "the muffs"—no grand manner when her turn came—no ostentation of leadership—no great depression at doing badly—no ill-restrained arrogance at success. She was all through the same happy, equable, resolute, amiable girl, a little conscious of being put forward as a champion, yet by no means shrinking from the responsibility; quietly pleased when the Vicar had a word of praise for her, or Miss Chivers came up with Julia and cheered her on, or Ethel brought her a special arrow, or Dr. Briscoe or Mr. Good-

rick complimented her on her skill. Amy did not, like some girls, seem confident that love and fortune awaited her the moment she put out her hand for them : she had rather a slightly passive look, that seemed to express the feeling that where she was no love could reach her, and that her life was consecrated to duty. It was not an ascetic or a Pharisaic look ; it was only an unconscious shadow of sacrifice, devotion, and resignation, but it gave a tenderness to her artless beauty that joy and happiness could never have given.

Miss Harker got a blue, and Amy a red. There were two more shots ; on them hung the fate of the match, for the wind was now so strong that only the two leaders came on the target at all. Miss Harker had watched Amy and discovered the plan of keeping far to the right. In the next round Julia got a white, and no one else anything, but Miss Harker struck the blue, and Amy the red. A gold now would tie them. Amy took good aim. She was calmer than usual. She aimed a foot from the target, and in a good line. She drew the bow firmly, till the back of the bow touched the lower part of the steel of the arrow.

“I daren’t look,” said Julia to her brother ;
“tell me what it is.”

Whiz! went the arrow, and then Tick! against the strained canvas.

The English gave a groan, the French a ringing shout.

“It’s a gold, Ju,” cried the Vicar, waving his hat.

“Oh, you dear pet!” said Miss Chivers, embracing her.

“Now, Carry, take great care,” said Mrs. Harker, “and you’ll tie her; but oh, this terrible wind. I wish to gracious it wouldn’t blow just now.”

Miss Harker was a little flurried. She thought herself sure of tying, and she wanted to tie in a careless, indifferent way, but yet she was fully aware it required good shooting, and she felt her hand shake, and the pin arrangement at the back of her left hand seemed to grow as large as a forest of fir trees. Moreover, she observed her quasi lover picking up Amy’s glove, and that put her out; and moreover, Julia Beauflower, whom she detested, and whose sarcasm she rather feared, smiling. She seized a moment when there was a lull, and aimed. She had drawn the arrow to the full, when, just as she loosed it, a tremendous gust of wind came, and the arrow, too much elevated, fell just to the left of the outer leg of the target stand. The French were victorious by

seven. In a moment Amy was surrounded by her delighted friends.

"If we had been only men," the brunette said, "we would have carried Amy round in a lady's chair."

Amy was almost unduly calm.

"Miss Harker," she said, going up to that mortified archer, whom her mother was vainly consoling, "that last shot of ours was hardly fair; the wind quite carried away your arrow. Let us shoot it again."

"Oh, no, thank you, Miss Robinson," Miss Harker said, with cold hauteur, and her head thrown back. "Oh, no, thank you. You've won: how, I don't say—but still you've won."

"I would really take her offer," whispered Mrs. Harker.

"No, ma; I'll shoot no more such a day as this."

"It's a day for accident, not for skill," said Mr. Harker, sourly. "But as the time is going, I must ask Lord Mazagan to kindly step into the tent and bestow the prize. I hardly like to give your lordship the trouble, but as you——"

"No trouble in the world," said Lord Mazagan. "I shall be only too happy to bestow the prize on the fair victor."

"I cannot accept it," said Amy, firmly, addressing herself specially to his lordship and Mrs.

Harker. "I never intended to accept it. I only joined the French side by accident. I do not belong to the Wiltshire Ladies' Archery Club. Directly I saw that I might win, I resolved not to accept it. I would rather, my lord, if I may be allowed to fix, I would rather it was made the second prize for the short distance."

"Affected little proud thing," said Miss Harker to her ladies.

"That is mere pride," said Mrs. Harker to her husband; "what intolerable airs these governesses give themselves."

"She knows they'll press it on her," said Miss Harker to her party.

She had disliked poor Amy before, but now she hated her as a rival. Naturally full of spleen and not bearing her protracted maidenhood with any very exemplary patience, she said to herself, "A mere governess at forty pounds a year—a little underhand thing" (she stood at the last target, spitefully plucking out the arrows as these bitter thoughts passed through her mind)—"affecting not to care about that splendid brooch and all the homage she's had to-day, and looking as demure as a nun, just to make a scene. If I've any power at home, she shall go within three months. *I hate her!*"

"I think," said Mr. Harker, stepping forward,

for people had begun to collect to hear what was going on about the award, "every one will agree that Miss Robinson has shown very good taste in this matter, and in declining the prize to which she had become entitled by what we may perhaps not unfairly call an accident. I shall, therefore, with her consent, put it up for the second contest at the shorter distance."

There was much secret indignation at this disgraceful injustice, but the servile herd soon discovering that Amy was only the governess to the Harker's, applauded the decision. The *oi polloi* on the Terrace took this disgraceful shuffle much more to heart, and after their manner were much prompter in their decisions, and much more outspoken in their opinions.

"Well, I never seed the like of that," said honest Farmer Brown to Mr. Pitts who, serving the family, was much more reserved in his remarks; "I never seed the like of that; if I was to get my hand on one of those silver cups my boy shoots for, catch me letting it go again till I knew the reason why. Suppose I caught a rabbit in a snare, do you think I'd let him go merely to have the pleasure of catching he again? Not a bit of it. But I suppose these gentlefolks know their own ways."

"I tell you what it is," said the head keeper,

very loud, to his friend Benson, the head groom, "it's another of the governor's confounded mean tricks, he's always at 'em—cursed tomfoolery. Come along, Benson, you come to the Lodge and let us have a friendly glass together. I've got some of the oldest rum to be got in all London ; we've seen enough of this cursed humbug for one day."

"You lads be off to the stable directly and see to the horses," said Benson, in a valedictory address to the grooms, who hung about near him ; "and mind if I find those body-clothes again not brushed, I'll make a clearance of some of you as sure as my name's Benson."

All Mr. Harker's servants had become tyrants, small imitations of himself.

The three grooms followed the two men wistfully till they grew small in the distance and disappeared in the Lodge, and quaffed the rum several times over in their imaginations.

Nearly everybody had retired into the English marquee to arrange the conditions of the next match. Mrs. Harker was all smiles, for she was delighted at her husband's clever promptitude in taking Amy Robinson at once at her word.

"The little artful hussy," she said to herself, "attracting everyone to her with her affected ways and sham modesty, and then giving up the

prize hoping, of course, that Mr. Cantelupe and every one would speak up for her."

Amy in the meantime, unobserved except by a few friends, had wandered up the meadow towards the lake, her bow in her hand, her quiver still by her side. Miss Chivers was with her, and Mr. Beauflower and Dr. Briscoe (Mr. Goodrick had left before) having wished the Harkers and their more immediate friends good-bye, followed her. All at once Ethel came racing from the tent, put her hand in Amy's and looked up at her beseechingly with tears in her eyes.

"Oh, Amy dear, you ought to have taken the prize. Papa and mamma were so vexed you didn't take it, and Carry is so hurt. Do take it, Amy!"

"No, Ethel dear, it was never meant to be put within my reach, and I had no right to compete for it. No, run back, darling, I shan't shoot any more. I wish I hadn't shot at all."

Amy's other friends were equally vexed at her decision, yet secretly they applauded her for her unselfishness.

"It was too generous of you, dear," said Miss Chivers, with kind reproof, "for you had fairly won it; it was all nonsense about the wind, that was as much against you as against the others."

"Oh, I am not generous—it was, I daresay,

my pride ; but I fear they never meant me to have it, and I saw Miss Harker looking so dreadfully vexed that I quite pitied her. For the time, perhaps, in the excitement I had almost forgotten I was only a poor governess whom nobody cares about."

"Whom every one cares about, you dear. You're a deal too good for these hard, selfish people ; they judge you by themselves. I wonder if Miss Caroline would have given back the prize ! O dear no ; I don't think so, do you, Dr. Briscoe ?"

The doctor was walking behind her with the Vicar.

"Not she !"

"Doctor, come and walk with me a little ; I want to ask you about those poor Chetwynds."

The doctor came, leaving Mr. Beauflower with Amy. Could that have been the object of worthy Miss Chivers ? They were both silent for a moment, and then Amy said in her beautifully frank and natural way,—

"I have to thank you, Mr. Beauflower," she said, "for all your kindness to-day among these great people. I do think it was your advice about allowing for the wind that made me win. It was so very kind of you."

"You value the little advice I gave you too

highly, Miss Robinson ; it was your own good eye, accurate observation, and calm persistency. I was astonished to see you so unruffled at failure and so unelated with success."

"I felt almost sorry when I won, to see how mortified those I had beaten appeared. Still I tried hard to beat, that I confess. Miss Harker would have beaten me, I know, but for the wind, and——"

"Her thinking that she shot too well to be beaten by any, that made her careless."

"Yes ; how could you tell what I was going to say ?"

"Because I tried to read your thoughts."

The Vicar said this in such a peculiar and almost tremulous voice that Amy grew silent again. Suddenly she looked up with a frank smile, and said,—

"Do you know I have broken one of the commandments to-day, for I have been envying Lady Mazagan, who can do what she likes, and is rich enough to despise other people's wealth, and has no one over her."

Beauflower was silent for a moment. A thought of his own poverty struck him then as with a knife.

"I am afraid, my dear Miss Robinson," he said, "that even Lady Mazagans are not as inde-

pendent as you would think. These great people often want money. It used to be reported that Lady Mazagan pawned her jewels twice every year for her two chief parties. But, good gracious, who are those odd people stopping in the fly? I suppose they take it for some fair."

As he spoke, the very Slobury fly that had brought Amy and Mr. Goodrick had stopped in the high road opposite the target, almost exactly in the place where Mr. Goodrick had fallen. The same man drove the fly, but he was now sober and alert. A pretty little maid-servant in a plaid shawl sat beside him on the box, and shared his throne, and a little trim man was mounting his head out of the window. All at once seeing Amy he looked back into the carriage, said something, then opened the door, let down the steps, and got out.

"Why, it's papa!" said Amy, running forward. "Here are papa and mamma, Miss Chivers. Oh! how glad I am."

The little man, in a seedy blue boat cloak with a ram's wool collar, advanced to Amy, who ran to him and kissed him, and then darted to the fly to welcome and kiss her mother.

"My darling Amy, how nice meeting you so! We heard at Slobury of this great archery meeting, and thought we might perhaps see you as we

passed, if only at a distance. Doesn't papa look well since his good fortune ?”

“Wonderfully well ! Dear papa, I have got you such nice lodgings at Fontford. Mr. Lawson's, driver—the driver will know—and I shall come to-morrow to see if you are comfortable. Mr. Lawson is such a nice, cheerful, chatty man, papa, and Mrs. Lawson is a nice, civil woman ; and, papa, there is such a nice large workshop for your painting. But I must introduce you to my friends. You have heard me talk of Miss Chivers ; and this is Doctor Briscoe—good, kind Doctor Briscoe—and this is Mr. Beauflower, the brother of Julia, whom I so often write about.”

The introductions were made with the usual formality.

“I do hope, sir,” said Mr. Robinson to Beauflower, with perhaps rather too sudden cordiality, “that we shall have the pleasure of seeing you soon at Fontford ?”

“I shall have great pleasure,” said Beauflower, his heart rather sinking within him at the ill-bred little man who kept saying sir ; but the mother he liked, as far as he could judge.

“Are you fond of art, sir ?”

“Yes, very !”

“Then we'll have a chat together about art.

I've got some sketches I should like to show you."

"I shall be most happy."

"I think, Beauflower," said Doctor Briscoe, "we are *de trop*. We'd better leave Miss Robinson with her father and mother, they will have much to talk of. We'll go back for your sister?"

That night as Mr. Cantelupe and his friend Talbot sat with slippered feet resting on the fender of the dining-room at Swallowcliff Castle, Mr. Cantelupe said, suddenly,—

"Well, Jack, do you think the Harker daughter will do?"

"Yes," replied Jack; "she might do, but the father and mother won't. But, by Jove, if that little governess had only ten thousand a year, I'd go in for her to-morrow."

CHAPTER IV.

MR. AND MRS. ROBINSON AT FONTFORD.

THREE or four days after the archery meeting the Vicar and Mr. Goodrick sallied forth, attended by Leo and Wasp, to pay a visit to the Robinsons. The former felt curious to gauge the mind of the artist, the latter to see the parents of Amy, to whom he had taken a liking almost unaccountable in so cynical and apparently cold a nature.

November had begun; the leaves were almost gone; the harvest was over; the swallows, those summer friends of ours, had flown to the African sands. The downs were looking bare as the Russian steppes. The few beech leaves left, hung like a spendthrift's rags upon the chilled boughs. It was arranged that Beauflower was to show Mr. Goodrick the ruins of an old Jacobean manor house that lay a little distance from the road, and about half-way between Summerleas and Fontford. The place would have more than an antiquarian interest to him, the Vicar said,

because the ruins stood close behind the old house from whence his friend Staunton had thirty-eight years before eloped with the daughter of the poor clergyman.

It was one of those cold fresh mornings after rain when the air is washed crystalline. The distant woods appeared nearer to the eye than usual, and their spiry outlines cut clear and sharp against the pale blue of the sky. There was no sun visible as a distinct orb, but there was a diffused brightness where it lay in ambush, ready to leap out, and claim its throne. To the southwest a long roll of ashen grey cloud portended future rain. The leafless hedges sparked with rain drops; and the withered branches of the larches, strung with small rough brown cones, glistened also with the evanescent jewellery of the morning. The road to Fontford lay between sloping plough lands and meadows, the Terrace woods rising at a little distance to the left, and on the right rose above the village of Summerleas the high fields of Farmer Brown, that led towards the upper down, and the wind-swept region between Bibury and Stonehenge.

About half a mile on the road they met Dr. Briscoe driving. He was good-naturedly testy, and had about him rather more than usual that secret air of latent power that doctors, Jesuits,

and confessors almost unconsciously display. He looked like a good-natured but rather ruffled Jove, who was too kindly to use his thunberbolts. The secrets of a hundred families reposed in his safe keeping. The skeletons of many houses were under his lock and key. Not a house he passed but he knew the secret sorrow, the threatened calamity, the thorn in the flesh, to which only death could furnish the anodyne. Not a man or woman he met but he knew their vices or their self sacrifice. He knew stories that, cast abroad, would have fallen like shells and shattered the peace of a dozen families. He lived like a man in a perpetual battle, and met death daily in his most hideous shapes. Yet, such is the effect of habit, he could dine and talk as usual after these terrors, and the secrets lying safely in his heart, causing him no more trouble than the poisons that nestled in the gilt-lettered drawers of his surgery.

“ Well, doctor, busy ? ” said Beauflower, after Briscoe had greeted his two friends.

“ Busy,” growled the worried practitioner; “ busy, yes—pretty life mine ; went to bed last night late, tired as a dog, just warm in my first sleep, the infernal night-bell rings as if it was gone mad ; popped my night-cap out of that little window. I made up stairs, found old

Farmer Hacker at Purtwood was desperate ill. Purtwood six miles off across the Downs—cold, and raining hard; got there, found it simple case of cholic—merely wanted hot fomentations that any child might have given; charge two shillings, and the old hunx will pay me about next Michaelmas, and perhaps not then; delightful life, country medical man; came back and found my assistant drunk—spirits of wine all gone; turned him off on the spot, and now got double work to do; hardly had time for breakfast—glorious life. Good-bye, I must be off—good deal of measles at Birdbrook.”

“Brave-hearted fellow, that is,” said Mr. Goodrick; “been in Bath, now, or that sort of place, would by this time in the day have called on half a dozen hypochondriacal old maids, and earned his six guineas. How irregularly these things go! I should have confidence in this man, he is quick and prompt; doesn’t humbug about and flatter, and try experiments, and dose you, only intent on bleeding your purse.”

“He is too honest for his own interest. Some people don’t like to be told they are not ill. They don’t like a doctor’s visits ceasing too soon: and why not visit them if they choose to pay? he is too honest.”

“Being a rare fault, let’s forgive him.”

At a turn of the road the Vicar took off his hat to a lady in black and her two daughters, pale, gentle-looking girls, with auburn hair.

"That is poor Mrs. Chetwynd and two of her daughters," said Mr. Beauflower, "a very amiable woman she is, and very nice good girls the daughters are, though the eldest has not much character. What an iniquitous thing that dilapidation law is?"

"I should like to hear about it."

"Well, I'll tell you. Chetwynd, the husband, who is just dead, was a kind, excellent man, but indolent, and generally careless about money matters. He was thirty years a curate in Dorsetshire."

"Oh, your admirable Church of England! Oh, your self-devoted bishops!"

"There is no brevet in our profession."

"Graveyard of hope and honest ambition, as modern journalism is the graveyard of genius."

"Well, it is, I fear. After thirty years of struggle and deferred hope, and at the close of life, health already going, Chetwynd, a man with five children, got, by importunity, and, I believe, the interest of Lord Mazagan, the living of Fontford, which brings in 245*l.* a year; but as there are no resident great men there, the poor population of town-people came to him for everything,

subscriptions, wine, mutton — everything. He was careless and generous, and never refused his aid ; but I should tell you one thing first. How stupid I am ! I had forgot the very gist of the thing. When Chetwynd came down to take the living, I and my father went over with him (my father had been his fellow-student at Oxford) to reconnoitre the place, and see the widow and daughter of the late incumbent. The widow, who had been the rector's cook, I believe, was a vulgar, ignorant, lazy woman, entirely in the hands of her daughter, who was one of your cunning, chattering, dashing young-old maids."

Mr. Goodrick laughed bitterly, as if he knew the race.

"We found the place miserably slovenly, not the least like the house of a gentleman. The old man was said to drink ; quarrelled with everybody ; once threatened to throw his church-wardens from the roof of the church, where they had scrambled to see about some repairs. The bedrooms smelt of smoke ; the hall was like a kennel ; the paper was peeling off the walls ; there was no stair carpet ; the cooking was done in a sort of hen-house ; the rain came in at the drawing-room. Well, the old woman and the daughter played their part admirably. They pretended to be miserably poor ; they cried ; they talked of the dear

deceased, and the cruelty of moving before the grave had well closed over him. They even hinted at pauperism. They prayed above all things for time. Chetwynd was a good Christian man, and a warm-hearted one ; he was touched to the core ; he felt that their sorrow might be his wife's some day. I remember well seeing the tears spring up in his eyes. He did, of course, all a gentleman could do. He gave them time to his own great loss and inconvenience."

"More fool he."

"No, don't say that. Moreover, he told his surveyor, who was to meet them that day three months about the dilapidations, not to be hard upon the widow—to take a lenient and generous view of the repairs, and not to stick at ten pounds or so against his side of the question. Their surveyor was their relation and the sharpest man in Salisbury. Chetwynd's surveyor was a good-natured, easy man, like himself, who did not know how poor Chetwynd himself was. When the day came to examine the roofs, walls, floors, &c., of the rectory, the old maid was there standing before him, masking that, explaining away this, and so chattering and bothering them that the survey went entirely in their favour. They got off for £117, of which Chetwynd eventually let them off £30."

“Fool again.”

“No ; you would have done the same. Well, one more child came. Then the fifth year Chetwynd caught small-pox in a poor man’s cottage, where he went to pray by a dying man’s side, and he died after a short but expensive illness, which also seized two of his children, who were with difficulty saved. The poor old fellow named me one of his executors, and I soon found out how matters stood. The family—the widow and five children, had literally nothing to depend upon but the interest on an insurance for three thousand pounds which Chetwynd had kept up through all his struggles and miserable embarrassments. The poor woman was still struck down with the loss, and the necessity of almost instantly leaving the home she loved so dearly (and more dearly now than ever, because it was near the grave where all her hopes lay buried), when a cold business-like notice came from the new incumbent—a fellow of Oriel—that his surveyor would meet any one they appointed, on such a day and hour.”

“Ah ! I can see, poor things.”

“The widow came to me about it, quite sanguine and unconcerned. The house had been so lately surveyed, and so much money spent upon it, besides rather lavish outlays on the garden—new palings and walls, that they felt, and

their Salisbury surveyor confirmed their confidence, that twenty pounds would cover everything."

"Twenty! Five pounds ought to. Paper and whitewash."

"Wait a bit. The day came. The surveyor from London, with no interest in the place, a keen, restless, energetic man, with two smart clerks, pushed off at once (as it were) the fussy, good-natured old fellow employed by the poor widow; he disclaimed all references to the past; he pried, and probed, and peered; wrenched up planks; went up himself into the roof, and reported sternly and badly of the whole house; the floors were full of dry rot, and one wall was wrenched out of the perpendicular by ivy. When his bill came in, the poor woman was almost paralysed by a total of £267 10s. 4d., of which our surveyor, with all his zeal, could only abate £14 6s. 2d. There they are now, poor creatures, with that dreadful debt hanging over them like the sword of Damocles; and they have to leave the day after Christmas, for the new incumbent is a hard business man and a Ritualist, and he is eager to begin with his chasubles and upholstery nonsense. Now, is that cruel, or is it not?"

"It is cruel, but our laws cannot be modified to meet every case of individual suffering. We must do something for them."

"I knew you would help me, and so will all the clergy about here ; and I shall ask Mr. Harker, he gives large sums sometimes to our local charities."

"Yes," said Mr. Goodrick, with a bitter sneer ; "on the eve of elections, I suppose. Now, you mark me, Beauflower, he will do nothing unless the subscription list is advertised in the county papers. My dear young fellow, you'll find out that man some day ; oh, the mark of Cain is on him. But here we are—is this the old house ?"

A little back from the road, down in a sort of hollow, there stood a large brick house with countless windows, with the shallow setting and heavy white framework peculiar to the early part of the last century. The brick had grown a mellow crimson with time, and contrasted pleasantly with the fibrous-like stems and the green duplicated leaves of the French honeysuckle, that covered one half of the south front. The garden between it and the road, bordered by some beech trees, was a neglected waste of old shrubbery, Job's tears, Japanese mottled-leaved aucubas ; glossy laurel, grown out of all shape ; holly, and laurustinus.

Mr. Goodrick observed the place with the eyes of a painter curious in such studies. Every window by turn he eyed almost as if searching for some face

to greet him, but all looked desolate. At the largest of the lower windows stood a corn-sack with a sieve upon it. No fire could be seen, no merry children's faces; all was cold and deserted as a cenotaph. A starling or two sat chattering on the roof—that was the only sign of life. The rooks in the elm trees of the nearest meadow were drowsily rejoicing in the mildness of the day. Both friends were sad.

“So this is the house; yes, and there is the window, the second to the right on the second floor, where the poor girl Staunton used to describe put up the signal for him when it was safe to meet in the evening in the ruin. Poor girl! Poor Staunton! A June night, thirty-eight years ago!—thirty-eight years ago!”

“There used to be an old postilion who lived near the Harker Arms, at Fontford, who remembered bringing the post-chaise to the farm-gate after dark. He drove them to Bath, and Mr. Staunton, he said, gave him five guineas for himself.”

“A tall, gaunt fellow, with prominent cheek bones?”

“Yes; why, how do you know?”

“Oh, Staunton told me the story a hundred times. They had four bays. The Harker Arms —“ Staunton Arms” then was famous for its bays.

There, that small window on the ground floor on the far right is where she leaped down into his arms. Poor girl! Thirty-eight years ago! She lived only a year."

"Only a year! Oh, yes, five years; went to Paris, and taught the piano and drawing."

"No, no, I tell you; she only lived a year—one year and a few days."

"I think you are wrong, but never mind."

"I am not wrong. Well, where's the ruin? Somewhere behind, I think Staunton used to describe it. I want to see where he used to meet her. Oh, how they must have loved each other! Eight years afterwards I've seen the big hot tears stream down his cheeks as he told me of those three short months they lived together; yes, people loved then—good was good then, and truth true. That's all changed. I loved once, too, and I love still; but there are no women worth loving now—only those half-men, who talk slang, and are ashamed of their own sex and their own natural feelings of gentleness and tenderness. Ugh! I hate the whole pack! There were angels on the earth in my days, and they loved the sons of men, and the sons of men took them for wives. Where are these ruins you talk of?"

Beauflower would not cross his companion in the mood that then held him. Old men are like

those who, Tennyson says, placed the golden age in the past. The Vicar was of the young race who see it brightening before them in the future. How can old men share the hopes of the young? Sympathy with youth is an effort to them. They know what a mirage love is, they know that all our pleasures are only illusions of more or less vividness. They have so often seen hopes pass like slides in and out in life's magic-lantern, and they know that they all end at last with the plain white surface of the shroud.

But the blood beat warm and fast in Beauflower's heart, his brain printed its ceaseless photographs brightly and sharply, a vague, longing aspiration for deeper love and fuller happiness was fermenting in his heart. He smiled pleasantly with an untroubled face at the old man's bitterness and his regrets, and ran before, shouting to Leo, who ramped after him, and to poor, little, lame Wasp, who trotted and shook gravely after his sager and more dignified companion.

They had turned through a farm-yard, for Mr. Harker's farm-bailiff had the house now, and lived in one corner of it, leaving the rest to the damp, the ghostly draughts, and the rats. A path across a meadow, where sheep were feeding, and a side door out of a second farm-yard, led to the ruin, one side of which looked upon a large,

old, neglected garden, one angle of which was alone cultivated.

It had been a manor-house of some pretensions in the reign of James I. Its first lords, the Mervyns, were people of some consequence, and stood several times for the county. Some crime was committed there in the reign of Charles I., and after that the Mervyns sank into neglect and obscurity. The Charles II. Mervyn, who cut down the avenue leading to the house, spent his gay butterfly time in London with the Court rakes, and was eventually killed in a duel in the lobby of Drury Lane, where he had struck off the hat of a man about town who had kissed a pretty actress then under Mervyn's protection. The next Mervyn, going too far the other way, was a mere country moth, fretting at home in obscurity and proud idleness. (It is just one race in a dozen that does not deteriorate in four generations—only the strongest wine bears keeping.) He was only known six miles from home by his breed of sheep and his extreme litigiousness. Once only the sun shone upon his house, and that was when William of Orange spent the night there on his way from Torbay to London. The expenses and display of that night nearly ruined him. He died a few years after, leaving no children, and his estate involved in debt. The cousin who suc-

ceeded, after a ten years' lawsuit, was a Bristol merchant, who never visited it, but let it out in farms, compelling tenants to buy his sugar and tobacco, and oppressing them through middlemen. The house then fell into ruin, and was partly pulled down by a bailiff who grew rich and bought it. Eventually it fell into the hands of Alderman Staunton, the great West India merchant whom we have before mentioned as the founder of the family, and the friend of Beckford and Wilkes, who used it as a quarry from which to draw materials for the house of his farm-bailiff.

It was almost difficult now to judge what the Jacobean house had once been. The moat that had guarded its south side was now a mere ditch, partly filled with water that in winter turned to a full flowing stream, traversed by innumerable trout. A tree or two only of the old avenue remained, the lower boughs of which were hung with wheat straws—toll that they had swept from passing waggons. The back part of the old manor house, mere roofless walls and tottering gables bound together by ivy, was boarded up, and used for a tool-house, which opened one way into the farmyard.

The door leading into the garden, on which the front of the old house looked, was locked.

“One of the carters close by here keeps the key,” said Beauflower ; “I’ll run and get it.”

“It used to be kept open.”

“What, do you remember that ?”

“Yes ; I particularly remember that the lovers used to meet in the porch ; she came there in the dusk by the garden, and he came by the back fields and through the farmyard.”

“What a memory you have !”

“Yes, of some things. I never had but that one friend, and I love all that he loved. He had regard for three families here, who had been kind to his father—the Cantelupes, your own, and the Browns. Those three families I shall always regard for that reason. Go for the key, there’s a good fellow. I should like to see the old trysting place that love had so consecrated in Staunton’s memory. I’ll wait here.”

Beauflower ran ; when he returned, he found Mr. Goodrick seated near some wheat stacks, on an elm that had been cut down ; and so wrapped in thought, that he was not at first conscious of the Vicar’s return.

“Oh, here you are !” he said, rising. “Well, come, let us open the door into this enchanted garden, the scene of my poor friend’s short-lived happiness and of his long sorrow.”

Beauflower opened the door and Leo and Wasp

raced in. It was a large deserted garden, half full of nettles and overgrown currant bushes, with here and there a mossy barren apple tree. It typified the abandoned hopes and the self-sown regrets of many a man's life. Here and there a peach tree still partly hung to the wall, from which half its boughs had dragged the nails and cloth loops that had once held them in vassalage. At one end of the garden still stood almost perfect the porch of the old Manor-house, with one large stone mullioned Tudor window to the left of it. The pillars of the porch were square, and panelled with what architects call the strap ornament. The slanting stone canopy of the roof was partly displaced, otherwise the whole work was as fresh as if it had been finished only a year ago. But the paving-stone of the entrance was cracked across and lined with moss, and the stone benches of the side were displaced. The generous window was, however, perfect; and it could scarcely have surprised one if Master Shallow had looked over a transom and asked one the time, or if the arch face of pretty Mistress Page, her little white neck girdled with a quilled ruff, had peeped from behind the massy central mullion, and inquired if any one had seen good Master Slender lately, since he had been hurt at fence. But, alas! it was long since the fire had gone out

on that hearth, and since guest had entered to claim a welcome.

“It’s a fine specimen of Jacobean !”

“Yes ;” said Mr. Goodrick, replying, but to himself, “this was the place that Staunton used to talk of ; here they met and exchanged their vows eight and thirty years ago. Out upon Time ! the poor girl is first taken, then my friend, next his father, all his race, and some day the whole ruin will tumble in, the whole story be forgotten, and the very scene of it destroyed. True is your dial’s motto, “Man’s life is but a shadow,” and yet eight and thirty years ago the two who met here thought their love immortal, and their joy an anticipation of heaven ! Bah ! there are no pleasures but those of the moment—a good dinner, a full purse, a fine picture. My philosophy is of the garden !”

“And mine of the porch,” said Beauflower, laughing. “I hold those brief hours of true love were in themselves centuries of bliss. After all, only death destroyed that love.”

“Ha ! Youth, youth—the old wheel of illusions ; but you will one day find what these things are worth, and how many grains of sand, how many parrot’s feathers, how many soap-bubbles, a woman’s love is worth !”

“Philosopher of the deserted garden of Eden,

you will never make me forswear my allegiance to love."

"Be it's slave then, and awake a shivering prisoner in the dungeon of matrimony. Ugh! you will think differently at my age."

"As you thought differently at mine. By the bye, Mr. Goodrick, did Mr. Staunton die rich?"

"Yes; he had only, I believe, two hundred pounds given him by his father when he cast him off, and half that he left his wife for her use till he could send for her; but he entered a merchant house in Cuba, in which I was junior partner, and made a considerable fortune."

"Who did he leave it to!"

"To me. We had agreed, half in jest, that whichever of us died first should inherit the other's money. With the yellow fever about, one was never safe, and such a compact was not uncommon at that time among mercantile men in the West Indies. This is an interesting place, I shall come here again and see it. Tell them, please, I shall want the key again."

Beauflower ran and took the key back, and the two friends started again for Fontford, episodically again from the road to the left to gain the Abbey terrace as a pleasanter way. As they got over the stile into a turnip field, the first of three fields between them and the Abbey park wall

that bounded the terraces, a man in uniform made way for them.

It was Archer, one of the county police, in the usual grotesque helmet and frock coat with pewter buttons of his class—heartier, but rougher and more undrilled than his city brethren—he wore a beard, was a little clumsy in gait, and had trousers tucked up in a most irregular way, for field walking. He gave a sort of rough salute as the two gentlemen came up, with a “Good morning, sir; nice weather,” and as they passed, stopped and looked after them. A policeman always seems to regard virtue as merely permitted to go at large on promise of future good behaviour. Terrible cynic, he meets no one whom he may not some day have to arrest. He believes in no one’s honesty, not even his own father’s. He may even have to lock him up some day.

“There was an old gent,” thought the P. C. to himself, “in the last ‘Hue and Cry’ I saw at Warminster, just like that old party; not as I suspect this old gent, but it’s always well, as the Inspector says to me this last Petty Sessions, to keep one’s eyes open. This wouldn’t be the first old gent as had drawn a parson into some swindle and cracked his crib into the bargain. Must inquire of that black fellow as I sees about what he is; but they tell me he’s taken that house in

the lane out of Fontford, so I suppose it's all square. But as for those parsons, they are mere children; why, any flat can gammon them. There isn't an area sneak in London that couldn't get a skiv out of them if he tried. Oh, they *are* soft, and no two words about it."

In the meantime the Vicar and Mr. Goodrick had mounted over the broken wall close to the keeper's hut which had so frightened Amy in the dusk, and following a side path through the covert parallel to the wall, they had pushed on towards Fontford, Leo and Wasp driving up the pheasants before them on all sides, while countless rabbits scudded down side paths, and now and then a grey wood-pigeon broke flustered from the tops of the fir trees over head.

"Isn't it a pity, Mr. Goodrick," said Beauflower, "that these keepers kill nearly everything but the game—squirrels because they nibble the tops of the firs, kingfishers because they eat fish, owls because they kill young pheasants, moorhens because they disturb the ducks—everything, in fact, that does not swell the bag and the keeper's fees, everything that gives variety to a country walk like this."

"Everything that cannot go to market, in fact. Oh! huckstering age, with the lowest of ideals, at home starving labourers and fattening pheasants,

abroad spreading civilisation by combined Christianity and cotton, which are inseparable in the Manchester mind."

Mr. Goodrick had scarcely given vent to his last bitterness when, at a turning of the path, Travers bore down on them, his cheeks swollen with anger and a too frequent recurrence to the little flat bottle in his right hand breast pocket. His hands were thrust violently down into the pockets of his stained brown velveteen shooting-jacket. He was followed by an insolent grinning fellow with a bundle of rabbit traps in his left hand, and a spade on his shoulder.

"This is a pretty bear-garden you're making of the place," said Travers, shouting to, and cursing the two dogs; "come here, you big beast, or I'll shoot you. Come to heel, d'ye hear? or you'll have a charge in you in double quick time. Do you know, gentlemen, you're both trespassing? Perhaps you're not aware these are Mr. Harker's preserves? This won't do, all this tormenting of the game. We breed 'em at a great expense, and we can't afford this 'ere hurly-burly. You must clear out, gentlemen, the less I see you, or any one else, in this park the better. I'm master here, and I won't have trespassing, and that's what I call what you are doing. The open terrace is free, but these here walks *must* be kept

for me and my men ; and now you know, and the sooner you get out of them the better I shall be pleased, for there's a battue to-day, and I must be getting the guns and the dogs ready. I won't have the pheasants disturbed, and so I tell you !”

This volley of insolent words, uttered in a loud voice and with sufficient gesticulation, had startled, and for the moment dumbfounded even the high-spirited young Vicar. He fell back, as braver men on the advance sometimes fall back from a sudden fire opening upon them from a masked battery. The man that formed Travers' retinue was grinning with stupid wonder and admiration at the audacity of the head keeper.

“Cheeking the parson,” as he afterwards expressed it at the Peal of Bells, seemed to him “reglar nuts to Muster Travers, he warn't going to stand no trespassing, he warn't. Lord bless 'ee, he'd turn back Lord Mazagan or the Bishop hisself as soon as look at he.”

“What does the man mean, Beauflower, by this insolence ?” said Mr. Goodrick, grasping his heavy gold mounted pimento stick rather menacingly, and two angry spots of red flushing out on his cheek bones.

“I tell you what I mean,” shouted Travers. “I'll tell both of yer. That I won't have, trespassing in these here woods, gentle or simple, or be

he who he will. I'm master here as far as that goes, and look you here, sir, I don't know your name, and I don't want to, but if that big hulking dog of yours comes here again, and you find him taken uncommon ill before he gets home, don't you blame me. As for the other dog, you see, he keeps to heel, he's had one dose already, and he doesn't want another, or it might take him in a different part, you see."

"You're an impertinent scoundrel," said Beauflower, his temper quite gone for the moment. "We have free right from your master to walk here, or in any other part of his property. Take care, take care, Mr. Travers, a little more of this insolence and your place won't be worth a day's purchase. I shall write this very night and tell your master exactly what has happened to-day."

"And mind it is *exactly*, for I shall have my story to tell too, long before your letter can reach. Take my advice, sir, and you won't waste your time and your paper—much good your complaint about the dog there did. I tell you no one interferes with me. I'm lord here, and I don't care that for you, or all the parsons in the county. And one word more—don't you be so free with your scoundrils and sich talk, or you'll have a letter from my lawyer, and he'll put you up a worse tree than you are already up. I wish yer

a good morning, gents, you'll find a road there to the left, and don't try this again."

As Travers uttered this defiance he snapped his horny fingers, threw his gun upon his shoulder, whistled to his abject dogs, gave some blustering direction to his man, and clambering over the breach in the wall into the field of young wheat, passed out of sight.

That last taunt of the keeper's struck home—was it possible, then, that the whole village was talking of his embarrassments? The Vicar felt the blood rush up into his head. If he had not caught a fir tree near which he stood he would have fallen. Did the very birds of the air spread these secrets, or did they ooze out slowly but surely from his daily business transactions, and the delay of this or that small payment?

The next instant a fire of anger blazed up in his heart, and he felt half inclined to club his blackthorn stick, follow the insolent rascal, and fell him to the ground. A moment more, and the long acquired professional habit of self-control, doubly his as a born educated gentleman, and as a minister of God, checked those wild impulses that in the wild man are the dawnings of murder. It was but a moment, yet it seemed years. He turned round to see what impression those wildfire words had produced on his com-

panion, but Mr. Goodrick was walking slowly forward, striking meditatively with his stick at the little dry fir-cones that strewed the path.

“And you expect much from a man who employs such fellows as that?”

“I do not like Mr. Harker,” said Beauflower, with a voice still perturbed by a ground swell of anger; “he is overbearing and mean, and tyrannical, but still I’ll do him this justice, if he had heard that man just now, he would have turned him off on the spot.”

“Not he, that man spoke like an authorised man—that man has a hold on his master, however he gets it—write to-night and you’ll see.”

“I will write to-night, strongly too, and I feel confident of the result. I will never set foot on this path again till that man is gone.”

CHAPTER V.

MR. ROBINSON SHAKING DOWN.

IT was about eleven o'clock, and Fontford was as deserted as a plague-struck city. The children were at school, the poor people preparing dinner for the shepherds and ploughmen in the fields. The sickly sycamores planted by Mr. Harker on the Prince of Wales being born looked sicklier than usual. There was a waggon at the Harker's Arms, and a boy knocking at the door of Snooks the plumber, up near the church. If London is too noisy and restless, Fontford was certainly too dull; they could not both be in the right. Salisbury Plain was not half so desolate, because it promised nothing, but the vexatious thing about Fontford was that there was an assumption of life not borne out by results.

Susan, the pretty little maid who missed London and would have given a year's wages for Punch, the Happy Family, the blind man with the dog, the dwarf with the accordion, the para-

lysed barrister in the Bath chair, a street organ to play "I'm as beautiful as a butterfly," the latest novelty then out, or any other metropolitan excitement, opened the door to them when they knocked, and informed them in a modestly coquettish way that Mr. Robinson was at home and Miss Amy, but that Mrs. Robinson had gone out to call on Miss Chivers and Mrs. Chetwynd.

"Your names, if you please?"

"Rev. Mr. Beauflower, and Mr. Goodrick."

A slight tremor of which he felt almost ashamed, an anxiety for which he could not account, a pleasure which spread a glow through his heart—these were the sensations that in the single instant that they waited at the door passed through Beauflower's mind.

A quick volatile little voice said—"Pray, show the gentlemen in."

Susan tripped back radiant with smiles of pleasure at the excitement of any visitors, and showed them into the small parlour. A chill succeeded to the glow. Beauflower saw no Amy, but there was a little brown glove, that must surely have been Titania's, lying crumpled up on the table near a roll of crimson and green worsted work.

Mr. Robinson was busy, his little thin pink face heated by the atmosphere of the small and rather "stivy" room, his white hair ruffled by the

hasty perturbed movements of his hand. He was diligently drawing on a larger scale, and through a large convex glass, a fine photograph of some Titianesque subject. The little table was strewn with portfolios, books, drawings, ivory rules, crumbled bread, chalks, charcoal, and pencils. One or two photographs from Raphael, Vandyck, and Reynolds, adorned the walls. On the mantlepiece, beside a Parian cup full of Russian violets, was a pretty little water-colour sketch of the Abbey as seen from the other side of the lake. A bottle of sherry and a wine-glass stood on the table. At one of the windows hung one of those pretty Dresden transparencies of the Madonna della Seggiola. Whatever the merits of the poor serf of a copier might be, however much he might be entangled in the deadly folds of that Jew *pieuvre*, Bassevi, no one could have glanced round that room without seeing that a taste, however humble, for art, had given it an intellectuality that was at once refining and elevating. A breath of the air of Olympus had stolen in and transformed the poor lodging-house of a petty and ineffably dull Wiltshire town into Fairy Land. Art and Beauty had cast their glamour over it, and bathed it in an atmosphere of poetry such as pervades Cuyyp's homely scenes. If our pleasures are all illusions, one of the plea-

santest of the illusions had effected this wondrous change. No one knows so well as an English girl how to spread an air of grace, poetry, and refinement over common unromantic daily life. All the Titians in the world could not have done what those violets and the glove did to idealise the room in Beauflower's imagination.

In a fussy inconsequential way, Mr. Robinson was most polite to his guests. He remembered that the vicar of Summerleas was the cousin of Amy's great friend, and he had already wormed out from Tony, when he had brought over some music books from Julia, that the old gentleman in the spencer to whom he had been introduced in the park, was an immensely rich West India merchant, a great art connoisseur and virtuoso, who had taken a fancy to Wiltshire, and was enlarging a house that he had rented from Mr. Harker up somewhere near Fontford, so he was all bows, and wreathed smiles, and waving of the hand, and regrets that Mrs. Robinson was out, and apologies for the miserably small lodgings, and hopes that they would take a glass of sherry; a new and too sweet, "but he really believed a sound and pure wine, obtained at the adjoining grocer's." There was a good deal of the fag end of George the Fourth's reign about Mr. Robinson's manners, and though too naturally bland

and chatty and weakly good natured to be disagreeable for a short time, he rather spoilt everything by a strained simpering smile, and the attitudinising grimaces of a second rate French style, which Mr. Robinson had been taught to think fashionable.

The artist was the son of a curator of the British Museum ; evincing an early taste for art, he had been sent to an Art Academy in Newman Street, where he drew from the model and the cast, and learned a great deal too much of the technicalities and academical jargon of his art, and a great deal too little of the inner and true spirit. A prize for the best copy of Sir Joshua in the mischievous British Institution ruined him for ever. He less and less aimed at originality of even the humblest kind, cultivated like most of us in life his strong points, neglected to develope his weak ones, and gradually sank into that most hopeless and miserable of all artists—the professional copier. A Jew picture dealer sent him to Rome and Dresden to copy for a nobleman, a friend of Lord Mazagan's, and he returned to spend all his money, to marry the daughter of a very poor Dorsetshire clergyman, to sink into hopeless poverty, and to become the inextricable slave of Bassevi—a heartless vulgar wretch, without pity or remorse, who had in his

time sucked the blood of half a dozen young artists of twice the genius of poor Robinson, and whose profession of a pawnbroker was a mere mask for money lending, and still more discreditable means of extorting money. It had been one of the Jew scoundrel's finest strokes to decoy this poor little meek slave of his away from all friends who could warn him or rescue him, away from all beacons and light-ships, to a lonely country place, where he could make him work for ten shillings a day at what brought Bassevi in two guineas, and where the Anglo-Jew could exert all his detestable wiles to win the heart of the pretty daughter, who had already caught his wandering eye.

"The gal has spirit," he said to himself the first day he saw her, "and she's deuced clever, but by the tabernacle stones I'd soon bring that down when I once got her safe in Charlotte Street, and s'elp me if I wouldn't put her in a bran new tobacconist's shop in Piccadilly; she'd draw in the swells and make a nice thing of it; and wouldn't she look well neither in an open carriage in the Park on a Sunday? Strike me if I don't make her take me, whatever airs she puts on, and if she doesn't behave afterwards, she had better look to it. I generally find I get my own way somehow."

Poor Amy, happy in her first unshaped dreams of life as Andromeda when

“Over the sea, past Crete, on the Syrian shore to the southward,”

Cassiopeia's dark-haired daughter chased the waves on the shore, heedless of sorrow or danger. There she sat now in the inner studio painting, as heedless of Bassevi and his wiles as little Red Riding Hood of the wolf. Alas for life! If we could foretell the future, what miserable Casandras we should all be, and without hope.

“You are painting for Mr. Harker, I think?” said Beauflower.

“Yes; a selection from Titian's works, pasticcios to go round a dining-room in panels. It will be a room fit for an emperor, and it is to have a ceiling to match, which I am now making drawings for.”

“I am not fond of painted ceilings myself,” said Mr. Goodrick; “they crick one's neck. I'd as soon have frescoes in my wine cellar; but these rich people, I suppose, must have their whims indulged.”

“Of course they must. I am to do a similar room for the Honourable Mr. Cantelupe. His are pasticcios from Rubens. There is to be a landscape by Claude between each two. It will have a very sweet effect.”

“Claude is so insipid.”

“ Claude insipid ? ” said the artist, with uplifted eyebrows. “ Well, he is a little monotonous ; but what charming classical gusto ! what breadth ! what repose ! ”

“ I see,” thought the old virtuoso to himself, “ this is a mere technicalist and texture seeker. I hold him as little higher than a door grainer ; but still he loves art, and has seen fine pictures, and he’ll amuse me and rouse my memory of the great galleries.”

“ Claude, Mr. Robinson,” he said, “ painted an ideal, but his ideal was inferior to what he could have seen any day of his life at Terni, or Tivoli, or in the Apennines.”

“ I quite agree with you,” said Beauflower, who was also fond of art, and no mean judge. “ I would rather see this world exhausted before we go to dreamland. Cuyp, now, had a sentiment, one sentiment, and that he always tried to express, but through the medium of common nature.”

There could not have been a greater contrast than Mr. Goodrick and the painter’s drudge. The one, hardened by time and fortune, polished into a cold indifferentism, never betraying by any outburst of enthusiasm (even momentary) any strong predilection for this or that master, but rather leaving the impression of a thorough knowledge of and contempt for all. The other perennially boyish,

weak, shallow, full of inflated eclecticism, a technicalist, a student of varnishes, mediums, and outward appliances ; a bright-feathered, airy shuttlecock of a man, of a gay mercurial temperament, easily elevated, easily depressed ; a bright-coloured little bubble of a man, certain to swim down eddy after eddy, and break at last without residue and without result.

While Beauflower was turning thoughtfully over an open portfolio of exquisite Earlom's and M'Ardell's mezzotints after Reynolds, Mr. Goodrick was turning over some coloured Titian photographs, which he at once recognised as taken from the doubtful but clever Blenheim pictures. Robinson did not make any remark, but kept placing the series in his hand one after the other, watching him with an innocent shyness, and exulting in his certain admiration.

The first was the Mars and Venus, that fine picture in which the lovers are seated together, his brawny sunburnt arm across her fair back, the wanton goddess holding his head while she lifts a little mirror in which she contemplates the two flushed faces.

"Mars' coarse—mere soldier's head," grumbled the inexorable critic, still evidently enjoying the beauties of the grand composition. "The flesh of Venus not up to Titian's usual mark."

"But, bless me, my dear sir, only see how nobly the rosy colours of this Cupid blend the rich browns and the creamy carnations."

"Hu-umph! yes, to a degree. But what's this next?"

It was the Cupid and Psyche. She is dreaming of her heavenly lover, who stands gazing at her, his "great brooding wings" outspread above and seeming to lift as you look at them.

"That's better."

"Better!—*it's perfect*. Look at the value of that little bit of ultramarine in the drapery round the neck of the Cupid; it's like a bit of blue sky clinging to him, some critic says, and, 'pon my honour, it really is."

"That was added only a few years ago by a picture restorer."

"Impossible. No; it is Tiziano; it's the great man, sir. I ought to know his brush marks. I spent two years in Venice copying him."

"It was added, I assure you, in 1798. The man who showed the pictures at Blenheim told me so himself last year."

"Then you know this set?"

"Oh, yes, very well; but they ain't Titians at all."

"You cannot mean to say you doubt the authenticity of these sublime works?"

"I do. I know they are not his. Use your eyes ; look at this Cupid and Psyche—very poetical, very pleasing ; but it's full of faults ; the Apollo is vulgar, nothing ideal, ill drawn, clumsy ; going away from nature without improving it ; the motive of the picture low and debased ; as usual with Titian, the man a mere makeweight to the woman. No ; it won't do—won't do at all. This Pluto and Proserpine is worth a dozen of it."

"I am astonished," said the little artist, putting up his double eye-glass to select a *chef d'œuvre* ; "it seems to me, sir, quite blasphemy to deny such works as these ; but I suppose people will always differ about these things. Now, here is a master-piece—the Hercules and Dejanira. Look at the unity and harmony here ; look at the grand spirit, the expression, the colour, the design ; the breadth ; look at——"

"I far prefer, for my part, this Bacchus and Ariadne. The Bacchus is vulgar, but the twine of Ariadne's body is very graceful, and the rosy Cupid with the grapes a fine bit of colour ; but the back of this Juno is the most glowing bit of colour to my mind, only the picture is spoiled by patches of crude white. I see the restorers have been busy here."

The little artist, utterly incapable of original

opinions, was awed and subdued by the knowledge of his wonderful visitor. He owned the white in the Jupiter, Juno, and Io was rather obtrusive, met the eye a *leetle* too much,—yet he scarcely knew, and he turned the photograph upside down and every way.

In the meantime the Vicar, roused to a languid interest in pictures that were mere grand compositions, had no story, pointed no moral, and were not either transcripts of nature or yet improvements upon it, had turned over the photographs as Mr. Goodrick threw them somewhat contemptuously. He paused a long time at the Neptune and Amphitrite, one of the most imaginative of the somewhat monotonous series.

“I am almost ashamed to give my opinion after you two pundits,” he said, taking up the photograph; “but this seems to me by far the finest. It overflows with passion. How the frightened nymph flings her white arms into the stormy ocean air, and away from the god, who is bearing her to his cave. In what a golden torrent her hair streams down a back worthy of Venus! What a glow of life about the flesh!”

“Ah! that is youth speaking; and youth and love are one, as Hazlitt says, finely. Yes, it is not so bad; and the Cupid and dolphin harmonise the whole skilfully. That is quite in

Titian's early manner ; but still it is no more Titian than it is Fra Bartolommeo. That Apollo we were looking at just now, that one by the Rembrandt etching, is as vulgar as Jordaens."

"Now, I cannot agree with you. My dear sir, only look at the grand manner—the gusto—the—the——"

"Yes—Oh, yes ; I see the big old style ; but they are not Titians, they are twenty years later ; why, they are 1596, if they are a day. On this sky you will see dry smalt has been blown, a custom which Lodovico Carracci introduced, in order to prevent mixing oil that might turn yellow with the blue. In this drapery of Ariadne there is lily green. Yes, I can see even by this copy a lily green, made from purple Iris flowers, not used till the seventeenth century. You see I have reasons for my doubts. By the bye, Mr. Robinson, did you ever try mixing Canada balsam—the balm of Gilead, I mean—with verdigris ; it renders nearly all fugitive colours durable ; it may crack a little, as in the National Gallery Van Eyck, but that's all."

The little receipt-monger was charmed ; he flew to his note-book, and his annotated edition of the late Sir Charles Eastlake's "Materials for a History of Oil Painting." He could have fallen down and kissed the boots of his learned visitor ;

laying aside his work entirely, he drew up his chair close to Goodrick—literally grappled and boarded him, and plunged into technicalities, chiefly about Sir Joshua's methods, the fact being that Mr. Robinson had been always unsuccessful as a portrait-painter from the heavy opaque tone of colour into which he fell when not merely copying.

"There is no medium," said the little man, nursing one knee, "like Sir Joshewa's solution of wax in Venice turpentine; his whitening and gum tragacanth, covered with wax and varnish, always cracks — cracks awful. I lost fifteen guineas by it once. When I want Sir Joshewa's cheesy impasto, I grind my colours first with oil; I then mix with wax, but you must take care of the fire, and for heaven's sake avoid orpiment and yellow lake."

"Sir Joshua (somewhat scornfully,) was a fool in some things; he used that treacly bitumen, and then drying varnishes over the half-dry colour, and so it tore away—he was never content. You know the old story, Beauflower, of his Indian portrait?"

One sign of a well-bred man is to keep conversation fairly distributed, and to resist all temptations to favouritism. Beauflower did not remember the story; a well-bred man never remembers a story that is about to be told. Mr. Goodrick's

eye kindled pleasantly as he launched into the anecdote.

“Sir Joshua painted the portrait of a young nobleman who went to India. The picture, executed with some of the most fugitive, meretricious, and dangerous vehicles, sallowed and faded year after year; year after year the original yellowed and shrunk too, till he almost exactly matched the colour of the picture when he returned and once more stood beside it.” This, like the anecdote in a scientific lecture, went all very well, but when the two connoisseurs relapsed again into purely technical conversation about meguilps and varnishes, Beauflower soon grew undeniably weary, half yawned, then restrained it so much that two or three more yawns broke out, one after the other. He turned listlessly a second time over the photographs, opened and shut a book, looked out of window, took a deep draught of the dulness of Fontford, then relapsed to the mantelpiece, and there found to his delight a very pretty Wiltshire view of the Upper Downs, which instinctively he felt to be Amy’s. It was not one of those conventional scrimmages with slopes of dark foreground to the left and right, and drawing master figures in red and blue in conventional places, but a quiet, earnest little bit of realism, gentle and unpretending, as Amy Robinson

herself. Wave after wave of blue distance, fading dimmer and dimmer, with a little grey needle which was the spire of Salisbury Cathedral rising over the furthest wave. In the foreground a clump of fir trees, passing into furze covert, beyond a boy sleeping under a crimson-berried thorn bush, and some sheep feeding in scattered groups. Here and there Amy's quick eye had observed a rabbit or two peering from the furze. It was a mere transcript of a simple passage of Wiltshire nature—no Niagara, no mountain, no ocean—nothing big or tremendous, but still there was a harmony about it, and a sense of sympathy with things “that daily seen please daily.” The Vicar knew the very spot, yet he liked it a thousand times better as seen by Amy's eye, and rendered poetical by her taste; so rapt was he, indeed, in his observation of it, and the pleasant feeling it gave him that she loved the county which he too loved, though why that should give him such a thrill of pleasure he scarcely knew, that he actually did not hear Mr. Robinson twice ask him if he did not think the drawing a pretty one for a mere beginner. The third time he startled, and slightly coloured, as he turned round and apologised for his inattention. He almost fancied that there was a slight sarcasm in Mr. Goodrick's manner, when the old virtuoso said—

"It seems to interest you, Beauflower, more than the so-called Titians?"

Beauflower said, "Yes, it is very pretty. I am so fond of the scenery of the higher Downs."

"Ha! you should see a glen in the Blue Mountains, that's something like scenery; these Downs tire one. They're as much alike as the palms of one's hands."

The Vicar was about to prick forth to the combat and do battle for Wiltshire scenery, when Mr. Robinson, looking up from a portfolio of the finest studies from Turner's "*Liber Studiorum*," said over his silver double eye-glass,—

"Amy—I mean my daughter—Mr. Beauflower, is in the studio drawing. I should like you so to see the Highland sketch she's doing; it is really very promising, considering her age, and the little tuition I ever gave her. You can leave your friend here with me; he is telling me about a very costly work of Van Eyck's at Louvain—Louvain, I think you said, sir? We'll join you directly."

Mr. Beauflower was most anxious to see Miss Robinson's work; he had himself done a little in water-colour. There was no one in the outer workshop, a plane rested in a companionable way on the plank it had been shaving, the 'prentice being at dinner; and on the top of a half-finished salt-box stood Mr. Lawson's brown paper cap, looking

like rather a vacant likeness of its owner, who at that moment was sipping a pint of egg-hot at the Harker Arms, and discussing the hopeless prospects of France in case of a war with England. The usual pleasant resinous odour, as of a half-cut fir wood, pervaded the shop. Beauflower's feet moved as noiselessly over the muffled shavings as King Lear's horses shod with felt. Half way towards the inner room the Vicar was arrested by a bird-like voice singing that pretty inspired song of the Ettrick Shepherd—

“ Bird of the wilderness,
Blythsome and cumberless.”

The song rose in a pure gush of liquid melody, artless, and full of melody as if it had poured from a blackbird's golden beak on an April morning. It rose and fell in wafts of delicious sound, not operative, but charming, from the happiness that inspired the singer, delightful from the absence of subtle flourishes and fantastic variations. Beauflower stood there like some shepherd who has stolen upon a fairy revel, and dares not move further, lest the enchantment be broken, and the sound and sight melt away into air. The slamming of an outer door, and a great raw country voice shouting—

“ They double-chained the highwayman,
And cooped him in a gaol,”

awoke him from his reverie. It was the apprentice coming back from dinner. Quickly then, for to a sensitive man all listening seems a sort of social sin, the vicar stepped into the inner room, hat in hand.

Amy, sitting with her back to the door, busy copying a water-colour drawing, started when he entered, and rose, as if to prevent her work being seen. She held out her hand with that unaffected grace that was her special dowry from heaven.

"Pray don't let me interrupt you, Miss Robinson," said Beauflower; "I came on purpose to see your drawing. Your father told me you were busy."

"Oh, it's a wretched thing. I am quite a beginner; but I'm very fond of painting. Papa is so kind in showing me how to work; he does not paint landscape himself, but then he is so clever in showing me the reasons for this or that tone; and Mrs. Harker wants me to teach Ethel."

Need we say that Beauflower praised her work, and found a fresh charm in it that was not in the copy. Amy was copying a very pretty sketch, from Mr. Tyrwhitt's book on "Pictorial Art," of a little Highland mountain stream, edged with purple heather, oak, ash bushes, brambles, and fans of fretted fern, with a great lapis lazuli cone of mountain in the far distance.

Amy had mapped in the washes of cobalt and rose madder, and the sienna and gamboge the day before. She had now reached the second stage, and had already flushed the left hand mountain top with rose madder where the heather was glowing. She had cut out the forms of the ash and black-berry bushes, and had heightened the shadows of the peat water in the pool with burnt sienna and gamboge, darkening under the big stones. Her quick, sure eye had not forgotten the touches of Vandyck brown where the water was deepest, or the yellow gleams of pebbles from the bottom, mottled by faint grey reflections from the large stones above water.

It was so pretty and simple-hearted a little sketch that the Vicar, in his fervent appreciation of it, found his cheek almost close to Amy's.

"What a lovely little bit of nature!" he said, "just one of those spots that I came upon in the Highlands in my last walking tour. I remember especially one Sunday morning in July, when I walked through Killiecrankie, we sat down among the heather, and lunched by a linn, where there was an old shepherd reading his Bible—a fine venerable fellow, with grey locks, the very image of a Covenanter who had sought refuge where the sound of the mountain stream would prevent any pursuing soldiers

hearing him as he sang the psalms of David—David, who, like himself, had been a shepherd, and a fugitive among the mountains.”

Beauflower, who had taken a seat near Amy, had grown quite enthusiastic as he recalled the Highland scene. He looked very handsome as his eyes kindled and his face glowed, and Amy, laying down her brush, was dwelling on his words, rapt by that magnetic power that intellectual excitement has over minds like hers, especially when they are conscious it is the excitement of one who sees further and deeper than themselves. All women are, or would be, hero worshippers. They must look up before they can worship. Amy had never been alone with Beauflower before; she had never seen or heard him in a moment of eloquent enthusiasm for the good and beautiful. She regarded him now with a secret admiration, not unmingled with awe. He was so different from the sordid, blustering city men, and the pompous, proud country people she saw at Mr. Harker's, or the shifty Bohemian sort of lodgers she had known in Buckingham Street. It gave her a glimpse of a world of brighter and higher beings.

“Are the Highlands so very lonely?”

“Desolate as a paradise resolved into chaos. I remember one stony glen, where no blade of grass grew, and where the eagle's scream was the only

sound." Suddenly, the Vicar, like a true Englishman, felt that he had been talking in somewhat too high-flown a strain, following rather the current of his own feelings than the necessities of the conversation, and he paused and ended somewhat abruptly, drinking in as he spoke a profound sense of the purity and grace of his listener. "I never," he said, "remember anything like the grey volcanic barrenness of Glen Ogle, except in a wonderful drawing of Martin's, 'The Search for the Waters of Oblivion,' where the searcher, a mere crushed sop of flesh, is hanging over a great flat ledge of rock where he has clung and died."

"Oh, I should so like to see that. Don't you think, Mr. Beaflower, these fern leaves want cutting out rather sharper."

Again their cheeks came near together, so near, indeed, that Beaflower almost felt the rosy warmth of Amy's face.

"Yes, I think so, they are a little indistinct. May I touch them?"

"Oh, do; ah! that's beautiful! Art is so difficult—at first it seems quite hopeless—but I love it so that I don't care for any trouble."

"Love makes all labour seem light."

Then neither of them spoke for a moment. It seemed a year to both of them.

"This way, sir, this way, Mr. Bassevi," cried a

cheery voice. The hammer of the apprentice was for a moment silent; then Mr. Robinson appeared, waving in grandly Mr. Goodrick and Mr. Bassevi. Why Amy, with all her self-possession, and the vicar, with all his pride and calmness, should appear a little guilty, can only be explained by philosophers. But undeniably they did so, and Mr. Beauflower was not relieved by seeing a faint flicker of a smile play around Mr. Goodrick's eyes. Mr. Bassevi viewed him with evil eyes. The "pieuvre," intent on a new victim, was dressed in a light drab greatcoat, and had a sporting look, which he assumed in the country, and thought *nonchalant* and fashionable. He was tapping his right leg, which was covered with a Havannah brown trouser of "loud" Jewish cut, with a rhinoceros-horn stick, heavily and vulgarly mounted in pseudo gold.

Amy held out her hand to him, with but ill-concealed dislike, and a change came over her expressive face.

"This is a great pleasure," he said. "I need not ask if Wiltshire air suits you, Miss Amy. What, is this yours?" (He took up the drawing in a familiar way which made the vicar's blood boil.) "Why, I could sell any number you like of those, miss, if you didn't put on too high a figure. At the Crystal Palace, now, they'd go

like anything for copies. Suppose you do me a dozen of those ; now don't be proud."

Amy smiled and said, "You forget I am a governess. I can seldom get time for painting."

"Oh, you can make time. Twelve guineas are not to be sneezed at. You do a dozen first, you know my money's sure. Put in some Highlanders, with a dead deer in the foreground, and a pretty girl looking on with some children. You do them by Christmas, and they'll sell for presents."

"I would rather wait till I can do better, and sketch for myself. I don't like copying, Mr. Bassevi."

"Oh, well, if you don't accept the money, it's no use my talking. I only thought it was putting a good thing in your way."

Mr. Goodrick had praised the drawing to Beauflower in four words, "Careful, but wants unity."

"My darling," said Mr. Robinson, leaning over Amy, and kissing her forehead theatrically; she felt rather lowered before Mr. Beauflower: "it's very nice and very clever; but your touch is too timid still, you must be quick and sure; and still a little spotty. Don't ever be satisfied unless you get breadth. Mr. Bassevi's offer is very kind, but you'll do better than this."

"By the bye, Beauflower," said Mr. Goodrick, "I've promised Mr. Bassevi here to ask you to let

him see that Cuypp and that Karl Du Jardin of yours. He is a great judge of these matters."

"Yes," said Bassevi, "there's rather a demand for Cuypps now; a year or two ago we were glutted with them." The scoundrel talked as if Cuypps were bales of cotton or legs of mutton.

Proud Beauflower rather coldly said that Mr. Bassevi was most welcome to call at any hour he liked, before twelve was best, as he generally went out among the poor then.

Mr. Bassevi, whose politeness was not carried much about,

"For fear that he should wear it out,"

growled thanks.

Mr. Goodrick and the vicar then left; the soft warmth of Amy's hand at the leave-taking seemed to linger all that day in Beauflower's memory. Without knowing it, he was on the verge of the precipice of love. On their way home the two called at the Harker Arms to order a fly to go and see Stonehenge on the next day—waiting for a moment in the bar parlour talking to the smart bustling landlady and the landlord, who was a sergeant and crack shot in the local volunteers. Mr. Goodrick took up that day's copy of the *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*. It contained a glowing paragraph in the country penny-a-liner's best manner, touched up evidently

from a private communication from the butler. After narrating the first part of the event, it concluded thus :—"Unfortunately a gale from the sou'-west soon set in with such remorseless violence that the shooting became altogether wild, and the judges determined (by consent of all parties) to have the prize shot for again when the wind lulled. The scoring was then properly attended to, and the prize (a superb diamond and opal brooch, manufactured expressly for the occasion by Messrs. Hunt and Roskill) was awarded to that superb shot, Miss Caroline Harker, the eldest daughter of the host, who has already carried off the prize at nearly every archery meeting of the season. The second prize, a silver arm bracer, was not competed for. The magnificent collation was furnished by our eminent townsmen, Messrs. Brown and Co., and did them the greatest credit."

Mr. Goodrick was furious, Beauflower quietly contemptuous.

"Detestable meanness," said the former, "not even to give the poor girl's name, or to mention her generous refusal of the prize."

Below the respectful but toadying archery paragraph was another, in the jocose familiar manner, also interesting to the vicar.

"SECOND MEET OF THE SEASON.—On Monday,

Nov. 5, the Swallowcliff Foxhounds will meet at Bibury Wood, on the property of the late Mr. Foulkes. We expect this news will delight our sporting readers, as the lay is a good one, and they know that the master of this pack needs no jumping powder, and is always in 'the first flight.'"

"Madmen," said Mr. Goodrick.

At the bottom of another column in the same page was this announcement, in the mysterious "puff preliminary" manner:—

"THE BOROUGH OF BIBURY.—The lamented death of William Foulkes, Esq., of Birdbrook, leaves this important borough open to competition. We hear on the best authority that a young nobleman of decidedly Liberal views, not a thousand miles from Swallowcliff, is likely to enter the arena, and this time with a certainty of success. His agents are, we learn, already soliciting votes from the chief members of this important constituency. It could not be represented by the scion of a more distinguished house, which has, however, hitherto been more Whig than Liberal in its tendencies."

"Oh, that incredible young idiot!" said Mr. Goodrick.

Immediately following this was the subjoined important paragraph, in the enthusiastic and social manner :—

“PRESENTATION OF PLATE TO JABEZ HARKER, Esq.—The splendid service of plate purchased by the combined subscriptions of the noblemen, gentlemen, and yeomen of South Wiltshire as a testimonial of respect to Jabez Harker, Esq., of Summerleas Abbey, for his twenty-five years’ zealous services as county magistrate, his kindness as a landlord, and his benevolence as a man, is to be presented to that gentleman by the Salisbury, Slobury, and Fontford committees, on Wednesday week, November 17. The gentlemen will meet at the Harker Arms, Fontford, at eleven o’clock on that day, and proceed in procession to the Abbey, where a cold collation will await them.”

“Pack of fools,” said Mr. Goodrick, “presenting plate to a man like that, because he is lucky enough to have twelve thousand a year, and knows how to keep it. If I was obliged to be present at this ridiculous farce, I really think, Beauflower, I should burst with spleen.”

“As to the meet, my dear Mr. Goodrick,” said Beauflower, “I have been, in my wild oat Oxford

days, a hard rider, so that I can hardly sympathise in your contempt; as to the election, I wonder at any man's coveting such an expensive honour; and as to the presentation of plate, I cordially share in your astonishment and your indignation. I only wonder they did not propose to gild his house for the man, but the age worships money, and we Wiltshire people down here are not wiser or less selfish than the world in general. It is only his tradesmen and a few toadies who want to be invited to his parties, who have got up this thing. It is not the county does it. No one respects him, and very few like him, that is perfectly well known."

CHAPTER VI.

THE TWO COMMERCIAL GENTLEMEN.

EARLY in this November of the year of which we write, two commercial gentlemen had arrived at Slobury one night by a late train. They were travellers for some large Houses in Whitechapel, one of which dealt in fancy goods, the other in cutlery, of which they brought a great many tin boxes of samples. They were both men a little over thirty, both wore cut-away coats, staring scarfs, small and very glossy French hats—both displayed diamond rings—both were loud and flashy in their talk—both drank frequent glasses of pale sherry, and boasted of the enormous business of their respective firms—both insisted on treating almost everybody who gave them orders, or who even devoted any time to examining their samples. They each hired a dog-cart and drove over the country in every direction. In Slobury they were decidedly popular, being showy, jovial sort of men, and by no means bad “company” in the

estimation of the small tradesmen and farmers nightly frequenting the coffee-room of the Railway Hotel, one of those raw new brick buildings full of flimsy ornamentation common to country stations. The landlord, a sharp, active man, who was also a carrier, liked them because "they paid their way *like* gentlemen," the landlady and bar-maid liked them because they were "*so genteel*," and paid them extravagant compliments, and gave them Mosaic presents.

The Railway Hotel was one of those staring new inns which are called hotels, just as misters have grown into esquires, shops into "emporiums," and third class schools into "academies."

The coffee-room had an elaborate bronze and gilt gaselier, hung with trappings of pink and green cut paper, walls decorated with a paper studded with gilt and chocolate-coloured flowers, on which hung half-a-dozen harsh, crude engravings of winners of the Derby, and Landseer's dogs and horses, in staring gilt frames, and over the mantel-piece a portrait of Lord Mazagan in his uniform as Colonel of the local rifles. On a side table, behind a shell-work box, there was a five-year-old Post-Office Directory, and a Guide to the Exhibition of '51; and on another table two stuffed night-hawks in one glass case, and an enormous perch in another.

It was the third day after Mr. Bassevi had honoured Wiltshire by his presence, that Farmer Brown, arriving at Slobury from the Salisbury market by the 3 p.m. train, turned into the coffee-room at the Railway Hotel to get a glass of hot brandy and water while the ostler was saddling his horse. The two commercial gentlemen with the large glosssy whiskers were seated, one by the fire languidly with his feet on the hob, and a bottle of sherry and a pack of cards on the table near him; the other writing at a side table. They had just finished dinner, and an almost visible odour of beefsteak and onions still pervaded the rather stuffy apartment.

“Good morning, gen’lemen both,” said Farmer Brown, courteously, unbuttoning his long, snuff-coloured greatcoat, and placing his Sunday hat with almost religious care on a side table; “been a deal of rain lately. May I trouble ee, zur, to ring the bell? Thankee kindly.”

There was an evident overflowing sociability about old Brown that was homely and yet kindly. The London men, always contemptuous of the rustic mind, saw in his frosty face only the dull farmer whose knowledge lay in turnips, short-horns, southdowns, and threshing machines. They overlooked in the magnificence of their conceit and narrow quickness, the occasional swift

keen glance that shot from the farmer's little cold grey eyes, that instantly relapsed into a blank good nature.

The idle commercial gentlemen with the bushy whiskers and redundant gold Albert chain, with three spade guineas appended to it, and with evident power to add to their number, replied "with the greatest pleasure, sir," and rang the bell accordingly. When the waiter came, Farmer Brown ordered his brown brandy and water of him in a friendly way, yet with a manner that implied he did not every day reward his skill at market with such a treat.

"Soda and brandy," said the man by the fire, with the grand insolence of his species.

"And bring me, waiter, a bottle of cham, and mind it's dry." The waiter bowed and left the room. "And what do you say, Danvers, to a game at three card loo," said the man by the window; "it's so awful dull down here." (He kept tattooing the table with his ring finger—quite a tune he kept—his business friend sometimes tapping too as if impelled by irresistible musical predilections to help out the tune).

"I don't care"—Englishmen are fond of this cold form of expressing consent, and the languid man as he spoke drew up his long shapely legs—"if I join just to kill time; but mind, Montague,

only threepenny pool. I am not going to make ducks and drakes of my money, I work a cursed deal too hard for it. Got a weed that a man can smoke?"

"Ya-a-as," said Montague, shutting up his writing case, locking it, and stamping three letters that he had just finished, with the most sharp, prompt, business-like air imaginable; "as you like, I don't wish to win your d—— money. I only want to pass an hour pleasantly. Try this cigar, old fellar, at all events it's better than the cabbage leaves they sell in this hole of a place" (and he tapped the table again reflectively with his bediamonded finger). "Perhaps you'll take a hand, sir?"

Farmer Brown said he had no objection to be zoshiable like, and he'd take a hand—he was a mere boy like at keards, for the missus 'ud never hear of 'em at whoame. "I'm a middlin' hand at krebbage, but as for loo I never played thich geam sept once on Warminster market day. Thankee, zur, you keep your chaer, and I'll keep theas un."

It was a singular thing that the commercial gents sang scraps of music-hall and nigger songs. "Immenschikoff," "The Daughter of the Baba," "Kafoozleum," and such ribald rubbish now under the patronage of Royalty, but never before

popular since the infamous days of Offley, the Coal Hole, and the Regency—and tapped out so many tunes, and smoked out so many cigars that in the course of half an hour Farmer Brown found that he had actually won two pounds six and sixpence.

“Take some cham,” said Montague, brushing his scented and redundant whiskers with a small pocket brush with a looking-glass on the back.

“Yes ; try some fizz, old fellow,” shouted Danvers, who had grown quite alert now, and was slapping the cards in the most artistic way ; “make the cards, Montague, they ain’t half shuffled.”

“Thee bist a queer quist,” said Farmer Brown, jovially, and admiringly to the shuffler.

“Here, take some cham ; it’s woke me up,” said Danvers. “Suppose this time we try half-crowns ; all the luck seems with you, sir.”

“I’ll be drattled if it ain’t hitherto. Him’s the vool that loses is my vayther’s motter, and it’s been mine.”

“Well, take some fizz.”

“I don’t like that zart of ginger-beer ; I’ll stick to my brandy ; but I must go now and see after my mare,” said the Farmer, putting up his winnings very complacently in a great greasy pocket book stuffed with notes, for Farmer Brown had

been selling sheep, "that infernal ostler is always half asleep."

"O, hang the mare, *she's* all right. Take a hand now in half-crown pool—five shilling pool if you like. Give us our revenge, it passes the time."

The eyes of the two London men flashed cross glances. Danvers tattooed on the table in a more lively way than ever. Montague shouting "Campdown Races," flapped the cards, and sent them in a rainbow arch from one hand to the other.

As if that had been a signal for Farmer Brown he instantly drank off the last drop in his tumbler, pushed back his chair, rose, buttoned his snuff-coloured coat firmly, re-tied his red neck-handkerchief, and rang the bell.

"Good marning, gents," he said; "I wish 'ee good marning. I've spent a very pleasant hour, and now I must trot whoam, or my good missus 'll be waiting tea. I make a rule never to play keards with strangers; but with gen'lemen like you—downright Lunnon gen'lemen—there's no danger. Good marning! I'll pay at the bar for my brandy!"

"I bayn't zich a fool as they thinks," he said, as he closed the door on the two dumbfounded cardsharppers, through whose nets he had broken,

and five minutes afterwards the sound of his black cob's hoofs died away across Slobury bridge. He laughed all the way through Slobury, and several persons, especially Mr. Pinnegar at the post-office, and Master Cullum the blacksmith at the corner, reported that Farmer Brown, though usually a steady going man, had taken a great deal more than was good for him at Salisbury market.

"Well, I'm blowed," said Danvers, angrily, with quite a different voice and manner from his assumed one as the farmer rode off, "if I was ever so chiselled in my life. The blamed old fool, just as we had the noose round him, too. Another hour, and we'd have sweated his pocket-book for him."

"It's a blessed rum start," said Montague. "Left us in a hole, by the living jingo!"

Here he gave a vivid but brief imitation of Mr. Toole in the "Pretty Horsebreaker," and then burst into a scream of vulgar, uncontrollable laughter, doubling up almost as if in pain.

"D—— if I see it," said Danvers, who when not acting the commercial fop was prompt and savage, having served his time as shop-lifter, swell-mobsman, and burglar, being, moreover, by no means unacquainted with the more distant of our foreign colonies. "You're always such a cursed soft fool—you seem to quite relish being bit by a

bumpkin like that. By all above and below, if it had been a little safer crib, if I wouldn't have split his nob with a Kennedy rather than have let him go away with his pocket full of notes to grin over the business with his yokels !”

“ Ah ! your blood's soon put up. You're always for the high Toby, Dan ; you were never meant for the quiet game. That comes of the salt water you've tasted, with a dash of red in it, too, I expect, coming back in that Yankee schooner without a cargo.”

“ Well, it would have been better, with all the risk of scragging, than rotting down here for a mere chance. You see we can't get a lift inside. A thing like this must be put up. I feel so cursed riled now, I could close my teeth on any one. It's the pride of the thing. I'll get drunk, and have an infernal row to-night in the billiard-room, unless the pool goes very well for us.”

“ Yes ; and get foolish, and blab everything. The bobby inspector here drops in there very often. That would be nice, now, wouldn't it, old pal ?—very convenient.”

Montague was about to burst into a second severe explosion of laughter, but Mr. Danvers checked him by swearing if he grinned again like an infernal Cheshire cat, he'd knock every tooth he had down his throat, and spoil his beauty for him.

At that very moment a man with a lividly sallow, Jewish face, looked in at the door, muttered some words of apology, dropped back, then appeared again. The stranger's eye had recognised some old friends. It was Bassevi, who, having come to Slobury station to see if some buhl cabinets had arrived for the Castle, had dropped in at the Railway Hotel to get a glass of sherry. There are men like Bassevi, who get into a habit of taking sherry at almost every house they pass.

"Why, Dan, it's old Shiv, I declare!" said Montague. "I say, Danvers, here's a go! Fancy old Shiv down in the turnip-fields! I wish he'd come in time to be chiselled by that old buffalo that slipped off our hook. Well, how are you, my old Israelite? What's your little game, now?"

Danvers greeted Bassevi more sullenly, and watched him keenly from where he sat.

Bassevi did not look as if he was especially proud of meeting his old "companions, partners of his toil," but he made the best of it. He shook hands heartily even with Danvers, who was sullen.

"Down here, boys, I suppose, out of the way, or bound to some races, eh? Both in the same swim again, eh?"

Montague nodded in a way that meant anything or nothing. "And what are you up to?"

"Oh, on the honest lay. I'm decorating Swallowcliff Castle and the Abey."

"The Abbey?" said Montague.

"The Abbey! Oh, you are, are you?" said Danvers, stretching out one arm, and whistling to his honest and alert chum. "Let me come and talk to Shiv like a father."

As he said this, he drew his chair close to Bassevi, who was warming himself uneasily, with his back to the fire, seating himself with his face the wrong way of the chair, as if he was riding. "You remember, Shiv, six years ago? I and Monty here, you know, and Joe Barnett, Silkey, and the Spider, all went to Rome on special business for you?"

Bassevi's face lengthened, but he nodded feeble assent.

"Good; I thought it might have slipped your memory, you not being a Christian, like me and Monty. In our anxiety to bring you home something worth having from one of those cursed palaces, the lot of us one morning chloroformed the old custoddy, and got out half-a-dozen of the best things. Unfortunately, coming out, we was stopped by a sentinel, who nobbled Silkey and

the Spider, and ran a bayonet into my leg. Do you want to see the scar?"

"No, never mind. Well?"

"Silkey and the Spider have not been heard of by their affectionate relatives since; but Monty, Barnett, and I nailed a picter each, which you had."

"And have now. Advertised everywhere by Pollaky and all that lot. No chance for twenty years to come. Dead loss."

"May be; but we ran the same risk as Silkey and the Spider, and all we got was a fifty each. Now, we want you to do *us* a turn."

"But I've left the profession."

"Greater fool you. Time to work again, then. It's no use talking gammon with us. What I mean is, you *must*."

Bassevi bent before the blast.

"Well, what is it, Dan? If it's found out, you know, I'm ruined for ever."

"Not you. The devil keeps his decoy ducks fat. If the bobbies nobble us we won't split, even if we go over the herring-pond for it. Will we, Monty?"

"Honour bright. Here, Shiv, try this cham."

Bassevi drank with the languid enjoyment of

a man drinking on the way to execution. His old sins were bearing fresh seed. "Well, out with it—sink you all!"

"It's just this: you know this plate that is to be presented to the rich old bloke at Summerleas. You are about the house. Now, all we want is for you to unbolt the glass doors of the dining-room that open on the back lawn. You've got a fine watch there. You see, you must get in somehow—keep every one away, and unbolt those doors twenty minutes before the presentation. A pretty maid-servant Monty here met coming to Slobury told him that the grub is to be all cold, and laid the night before, and the room is to be then locked. The plate is to come the night before, too, and it is just possible Monty and I might like to have a look at it undisturbed."

"But you don't know the house?"

"Don't we, really. Oh, yes, we do. Monty and I were taken in one morning by one of the grooms before the family was down, and besides Monty and I have been at night and looked at the back windows. A child might crack that crib, if it wasn't for the bells the fools hang on every door and the loose iron shutters in the lower rooms. No; it must be a 'put up.' Monty somehow couldn't bring the slavey to the mark,

and the old bloke of a butler keeps a six-shooter loaded in his room."

"I wish he had it against your skull now," thought Bassevi, as he muttered a sullen assent.

"What is that noise, Monty? Some one listening," said Danvers.

There certainly was a thump at the door; Bassevi looked frightened, Montague curious to know what it was, and Danvers savage.

They opened the door. It was Paddy Blake, evidently dead drunk, and leaning against the wall. They kicked him, shook him, but he made only one answer in broad Wiltshire.

"That's the beer to drow a man. Bring a quart more, I zay, of the knock-me-down stuff."

"Leave that fool," said Danvers; "he's all right. He comes here with Harker's grooms and the keepers that bring the rabbits. He came over this morning to see Cantelupe's horse Immenschikoff started for York; the blackguard is stark mad about that horse. Is there any good in the beast, Shiv? Is he worth putting a fiver on?"

"Put a dozen fivers on him, Dan, if you can; he'll whip the whole lot."

It is unnecessary to any longer linger with

these three scoundrels. Suffice it to say that Bassevi finally consented, somewhat reluctantly, if possible to undo the windows; and, moreover, by all that was "open and shut," that greatest and most binding of thieves' oaths, not to betray the "little game" of the two shrewd swell-mobsmen.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECOND MEET OF THE SEASON.

EARLY on the morning of the second meet of the Swallowcliff fox-hounds, Mr. Beauflower received the following curt letter from the Abbey, relative to his complaint about the insolence of the head keeper.

"November 5, 1860.

"DEAR SIR,

I am sorry that you should have experienced any annoyance whilst walking in my property. Mr. Travers, my head keeper, has, however, the entire management of these petty matters, and I feel sure he exercises his power with sagacity and discretion. The stray dogs of the poor people are very destructive to my game, and I can scarcely wonder at his irritation at any intrusion on the by-paths near the choicest parts of my coverts, when all the chief roads on the terraces and elsewhere are now fully thrown

open, as they always were, to my friends and neighbours.

“I am, dear sir,

“Yours most faithfully,

“JABEZ HARKER.”

“REV. EDWARD BEAUFLOWER.”

The Vicar was too mortified to confess his rebuff to Mr. Goodrick, or even his sister, so he scrunched up the letter angrily, thrust it deep into his study fire, and said nothing about it. Nor was there indeed a necessity for any immediate notice of it, for Mr. Goodrick had gone up to town to select some articles of *vertu* (chiefly ivories and enamels), which he had been requested to send to an exhibition about to be opened at Berlin. He would not return for a week.

The fifth was a day long looked forward to by the boys of London, being the anniversary of the death of that misguided hero, Guido Fawkes, the son of the Yorkshire doctor; but the festival was not much appreciated at Summerleas, except as an excuse for satirical scarecrows, or as a means of procuring money for fireworks.

Mrs. Beauflower was that morning in a state of great and eloquent indignation, Mary the housemaid having broken a tea-cup whilst bringing in the breakfast things, and Mrs. B. having also

detected several spots of rust on the steel fire-irons in the best bedroom.

"Servants are no servants now-a-days," she exclaimed, pathetically, while putting sugar in the cups ; "as I told Miss Chivers and Mrs. Robinson, myself, only yesterday when they called. Servants are all ladies now, fine madams, forsooth, with their silk dresses, and letter-writing, and brooches, and nonsense ; but things are all altered ; the world is turned upside down, and it's no use your saying it isn't bad, Ned, for it is, and every sensible person must see it. They do nothing well. They waste and spoil, and just as you are getting them a little in your ways, they go and marry."

Julia suggested that servants perhaps liked to be independent, with a home of their own, like other people.

"Stuff and nonsense ! I'm surprised, Julia, a girl of your usual good sense to talk so exasperatingly. What do nine-tenths of them marry to but rags, and poverty, and slommocking, idle, good-for-nothing husbands, for whom they slave, without getting a thank you. Mr. Goodrick and I agree on this point entirely. He'll tell you."

"My dear mother," said the Vicar, in hopeless appeal, "do throw yourself in their place. Is the life an agreeable one ? perpetual imprisonment with hard labour, a glimpse of a sweetheart once

a week, and then generally a surreptitious glimpse—in the far distance, perhaps, as in a penny valentine—a marriage with a young man in a blue frock coat, and subsequent bliss, on fourteen shillings a week, finally, an old age in a workhouse, separated from the blue frock coat, doubled up with rheumatism, and shivering with palsy.”

“I don’t like to hear you talk so lightly,” said Mrs. Beauflower, in her matter-of-fact way, “and pray, Edward, don’t mention these things when the servants are in the room, or you’ll ruin them entirely. They’re bad enough already, and how Mrs. Robinson can send that flighty girl of hers here so often, when she knows that that silly young man of Mr. Bassevi’s always waits for her at the Post Office, I can’t think; but, there, some people have no more thought than children. I suppose, poor thing, she has not been much accustomed to any comfort.”

Mary just then came in to clear away, and Mrs. Beauflower by a side wind (a woman’s favourite but somewhat ungenerous mode of administering advice), improved the occasion, as her son and daughter divided the “Times” between them with an unobserved smile at their mother’s untiring but mistaken energy.

“And I am sure,” continued the old lady, talking to the world in general, “that servants

now are no more like the servants of my young days, than chalk is like cheese. Old Nancy Hodges, who lived with my father two-and-twenty years, never wore anything but mob caps in her life, and never anything but dark stuff dresses, generally brown. As for your flyaway ribbons and brooches, we should have thought she had gone mad, if she had ever attempted such a thing, and I remember once when she went to Dorchester fair, she—Let me see, it was in eighteen hundred and——”

Mary, thoroughly cognisant of the severity of the side wind, here maliciously interrupted the old lady's sluggish flood of memory, by asking in a quick, smart manner, if she should put on some coals.

“No. Certainly not,” said the old lady, indignantly, “you servants will ruin your master in coals. We had a ton in only three weeks ago, and now——”

“Shall I bring a block of wood, ma'am? I suppose master's study fire is to go out?”

“Yes, Mary,” said Beauflower, in that kindly manner he always maintained to servants, and which tended to mitigate the severity of the maternal government. “I and Miss Julia are going to the fox-hounds' throw off? Is George any where about?”

"He is rolling the lawn, sir. Shall I tell him to put the horse in, sir?"

"No, thank you, Mary, I'll go out myself. I want to see how the weather looks."

"I do so miss Mr. Goodrick, mamma, you don't know," said Julia. "Don't you, Ned?"

"Very much, indeed," said Mrs. Beauflower.

"Yes, very much, and yet you're always sparring, you two."

"Oh! that's all fun. I shall be quite sorry when his house is finished; and they like Tony, too, in the kitchen. Mary tells me he's as proud of his master as old Leo here is."

Then Julia stooped, and fondled the grand head that the Newfoundland, much to Wasp's jealousy, was thrusting into her hand. On the hearth-rug, the Vicar's favourite cat lay curled up into a ball, the very image of luxurious and careless happiness.

"You're never going to that fox-hunting?" said Mrs. Beauflower, who had a small wet blanket generally ready to throw on all youthful expectations; "what! such a chilly morning as this, shivering about at a wood side just to see a lot of foolish people ride after a fox, and break through hedges, and tumble over gates, and break their bones in what they call 'sport.'"

"Oh yes! we're going, mother," said Beauflower,

firmly, being accustomed to such onslaughts; "the sun is coming out, and it will do Julia good to see the men in scarlet. I only wish I could follow them, but I don't like friends' horses; besides, I have parish work. Come, Ju, put on your waterproof, the pony-carriage will be round in twenty minutes. Now, don't dawdle; sharp's the word!"

The Vicar went to the front door, and looked out. There was George sweeping the part of the lawn which he had not yet rolled. The part he had done was clearly traceable by the darker stripes where the roller had not passed, and the broad silvery bands where it had. The slight frost of the morning still lay in shady places round the pond that was filmed with the thinnest ice, and it was held up in small patches, as if reproachfully, in the green hollowed palms of the cabbage leaves. A robin was singing innocently and confidently to George, in thanks for the worms his spade had lately turned up in the potatoe patch. A thrush, with his eye on a retiring snail at the foot of a tree, nestled in the dark Portugal laurel, waiting till George left the lawn, or was called in-doors for a moment. The frosty dew was melting fast, and the sun growing stronger over the Abbey woods.

"Do you think the scent will lie this morning?" said the Vicar.

“’Ees, zur. Right down well; it’ll be breast high afore you get to covert side. Mr. Cantloop he past just now in his scarlet. He’s always vurst.”

“How’s old Iles getting on now? I hear bad reports of him. Doesn’t he drink a good deal?”

George, a gaunt, red-haired fellow, of about thirty, was much too fond of beer himself; but he assumed an air of the most Pharisaical self-consequence on being asked for this information. He leant on his broom, and tilting up his rusty hat (originally a Bond Street one of the Vicar’s), and scratching his head, grinned, but made no answer.

“Speak out, man. What is this new story about old Iles? I am afraid he’s incorrigible.”

“Old gen’leman was drunk three days together last lambing time, and he laid down, as old Pin-negar told me, by the doower of the ‘Peal of Bells,’ and wanted zumbody to hould un. When the carter at the Abbey, and Mr. Pitts, and one or two others, kept axing if a’d ha’ a leetle drap mwore, old Iles zung out, ‘Noa, noa, I won’t ha’ a drap.’ ‘Do’ee,’ zaid they, ‘do’ee ha’ a drap mwore.’ ‘Noa, I won’t, not a drap,’ grunts he again. At last the old shepherd of Muster Brown’s goes up to un, and tries un, and then old Iles cried out, ‘Noa, I can’t get a drap mwore

down un. Drow't ouver m' veace,' zays he; 'od rat un, he's a good un."

George, as he completed this story, by no means exalting to the Saxon character, laughed in a dry inaudible way, and got very red in the face over it. The Vicar laughed too, but deprecatingly.

"But lambing time's a long time ago, George; he took the pledge, you know, in the summer, with you."

"Zo he did, but he broke it zoon. I seed him last night at Fontford, so drunk that he couldn't walk, or stand, or lie down, without houlding. He zaid to me all the houzes was a danting, and so were the moon and the zeven stars, zays he. Policeman took he up at last for shouting zo for more beer at the 'Harker Arms.' I told he it was mortal wrong not to keep pledge. I've been a different man, zur, ever since I took pledge. Yell's nought to me now."

"‘Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.’ Mind you keep it, George, and don't be too confident of yourself. Now go and get the mare in, and mind you take the cart to-day to Birdbrook for those potatoes, George."

Presently the little basket carriage came round. Julia appeared in her grey waterproof, and a round black hat with a saucy scarlet wing on one side of it, alert, lively, and sensible as

usual, and with her driving gloves on. George stood stolidly pleased at the mare's head, having already thrown open the back gate. Mrs. Beauflower was smiling to them from the side parlour window, the old lady being much refreshed by a recent severe and public denunciation of modern servants and their ways in the kitchen, *à propos* of the excessive consumption of butter the preceding fortnight. The compact was, that Julia was to drive to the covert, and the Vicar back.

The sun was growing warmer, the road was in good condition, the laurel leaves in the village gardens shone like mirrors. As George let go the mare's head in the true professional way, Julia steered her out between "the dock gates," as her brother called them, with solidness and dexterity. She was smart and quick in all she did, and always intent on what she was about. The children at the village school-door gave a shout of greeting as they dashed past, and Mrs. Pinnegar, a tall lank slut, rushing out of her mucky cottage, snatched up a sturdy, half-naked youngster, "a little mossul" as she called him, who was playing recklessly in the mud, from under the very feet of the Vicar's high-spirited mare.

The elm boughs shook down dew drops on them. The lake gleamed with a silver radiance, like a degenerated Pactolus. Julia chattered and

laughed, as happy as any of the skylarks singing overhead. Merrily the carriage wheels chased each other in their hopeless competition. Pleasant it was to see the lodgekeepers and the rosy shy children, and the old people at cottage doors, and the old men digging in their gardens, and the red burly waggoners greet the pleasant-spoken Vicar and his pretty sister, who was indeed a favourite with every one that was not afraid of her.

Now and then they met somebody bound on the same errand. First Farmer Brown's wild young son Robert, a fine-grown fellow with broad chest, roving dark eyes, and large wiry black whiskers. Then two of Mr. Harker's grooms, one with a led horse. As they grew nearer the covert, they overtook more farmers, and last of all Tom Burton, Mr. Cantelupe's huntsman, with the hounds, fine dapple fellows, that required incessant shouting of their names to prevent them at once beginning an impromptu wild hunt of their own.

Just then Swallowcliff woods, tree after tree, came in sight, with that blue mist that the Slobury people always call "Kitty Bailey brewing," steaming up from them. The nearer woods stood out quite dark against the further and bluer waves. The wind blew fresher too as the sun rose higher.

The Vicar, in wild spirits, forgetful for the moment of black Care, that takes the back seat

sometimes even in pony-carriages, was shouting, much to Julia's delight, with excellent and unaffected elocution, Mr. Charles Kingsley's clever but paradoxical eulogy of the north east wind.

"Welcome, wild north-easter,
Shame it is to see
Odes to every zephyr,
Ne'er a verse to thee.

"Welcome back, north-easter,
O'er the German foam,
O'er the Danish moorlands,
From thy frozen home.

"Hark, the brave north-easter !
Breast high lies the scent,
On by holt and headland,
Over heath and bent."

"There are dashing lines. Do you hear the horn, Ju ?"

Julia looked very pretty as she leant forward and bent her saucy head to listen.

"Chime, ye dappled darlings,
Through the sleet and snow,
Who can over ride you ?
Let the horses go !

"Chime, ye dappled darlings,
Down the roaring blast ;
You shall see a fox die
Ere an hour be past."

"Why, hallo! Beauflower," said a sturdy voice behind him, "what's the matter with you? I heard you a quarter of a mile off, shouting like a Cheap Jack at a fair."

It was Dr. Briscoe, full of secrets as usual, and keen and self-contained, but enjoying the hour of leisure, and the anticipations of a fine sight.

"I can't follow them," he said, pointing to the head of the big bony cob he bestrode, "though this horse is very sure at his fences, and would not be by any means last; but I've got a case of measles at Stoa's Nest, and I only take the covert by the way."

"Dr. Briscoe," said Julia, leaning forward, "if you broke your leg out hunting, should you attend yourself?"

The doctor laughed in his dry way. "No, certainly not, without a fee. I should be a bad patient, for I don't like medicine. By-the-bye, Beauflower, what a confounded shallow age this is. I constantly meet fellows who will talk shop with me, and I generally find their knowledge is exhausted in about the third question. I met that young prig Talbot just now, on a short-legged brown animal that he considers up to anything; he began talking of heart disease, as his rich uncle in Norfolk shows favourable symptoms of it. He had read some article in a medical journal, knew all about systole and diastole, and thick blood and thin blood, and the valves, the aorta, ossification, and all the rest of it, but I went one inch further, and he was quite lost. Clever people

now want spoonfuls of everything; they're like children at a dessert, they don't relish a cut from the solid joint. It is the shallowest age that ever was. Young fellows go about now snapping at every new fact, like dogs in a snow storm."

By the time the doctor had delivered this tirade against modern sciolists, the Vicar's pony-carriage had reached the lane leading to the covert.

"I hope the Harkers will let poor Amy come," said Julia, "she is so fond of riding, and she rides so well, twice as well as that odious, envious Miss Harker, who is always talking at her."

A short lane, and then a waggon road across a stubble field, brought them to the covert side, where some twenty horsemen were already collected. There was Lord Mazagan there, looking very knowing, on Moonraker, his grey, light, fleshy, "varmint" looking horse, tall, but all muscle and wire; famous for his raking style at a fence, and ready, as the whipper-in used to say, to jump two fields at once; and Mr. Cantelupe was very conspicuous on Clinker, a golden coloured, lengthy, fifteen-three chestnut, a six hundred guinea horse, warranted to go at anything, safe, fast, and never known to tire. There were also all sorts of men on all sorts of horses, doctors, gentlemen-farmers, yeomen, livery-stable

keepers, grooms, and a sporting rector or two. There were one or two farm bailiffs, on thick lumpy horses, and several old squires on the now scarce old stamp of hunters, the lengthy short-legged animal, slow over grass, but great over plough and strong fences. Lord Mazagan and Mr. Cantelupe had already trotted up to the pony-carriage and greeted Beauflower and his sister, when the Harkers' barouche arrived. It contained Mr. and Mrs. Harker and Ethel. Mr. Harker was in hunting dress, his groom having his first horse, Ravenhill, a thick sort of animal, a bay, with short legs and a clean made head, waiting for him. Mrs. Harker, all smiles and nods, was watching her daughter, who, followed by her groom, rode somewhat distrustfully on a flashy, fast, high-tempered chestnut mare, with a restless reddish eye, but no particular fault, except that grievous one, of short shoulders. Presently up came crowds of more horsemen, then the hounds and more hunting men.

Amy, by special request, rode Ethel's piebald, mouse-coloured, Welsh pony, not yet recovered from clipping; she looked very pretty in her tight fitting, trim riding-habit, and little round hat with green feathers, and she rode humbly and silently by Miss Harker's side, playing the captive King John to her Black Prince.

Miss Harker looked unusually well for her, her fashionably made habit fitting to perfection ; her rather scanty hair, screwed up in a curt Diana like knot, threw her tall hat rather forward, and gave it a piquancy ; such momentary advantages women of Miss Harker's age and character always know how to make the best of, just as clever artists avail themselves of small accidents in surface and texture. She smiled archly as she bowed to Cantelupe, and with that indescribable manner that women know how to assume when they like a person, leaving the interpretation of it entirely to the recipient. Her smile, however, was not so spontaneous and sunny as it ought to have been, and had a habit of checking itself suddenly, as if some spring in the facial machinery did not work so freely as it ought to do, and, to tell the plain truth, this partly arose from one of those prudential reasons that check social spontaneity, for Miss Harker's side teeth were a little deficient in whiteness, and art, that rather valuable auxiliary to the beauty of certain ages, had not yet been called in to repair the inroads of time. Still it must be confessed that Miss Harker coquetted very prettily with her little gold-mounted whip, and had thoroughly mastered all the little *minauderies* of the fashionable horsewoman. She had

learnt, to the very *finis* of the book, the *agacerie* that attracts and pleases men who like to see a woman on horseback. By her side came poor Amy, with her innocent enjoyment of riding for its own sake, her youthful delight of the fresh morning and the animated scene by the covert side, where a squadron of some two hundred stalwart, strong nerved men in scarlet had now gathered round Lord Mazagan, to whom his nephew had, with the best taste, delegated that day his command as master of the hounds, already in a restless ferment of excitement round the nearest gorse bushes; Amy was guileless and unconscious of the appreciative glances that crossed and recrossed as people ambled past her, and who was pleased that Julia and her brother could see her progress in the noble art—she had only two circumstances that lessened her enjoyment, and those were that her father and mother and the major could not see her enthroned on her pony, and that the terrible Mrs. Harker, who had of late been so harsh and repelling, was present to damp her spirits.

Talk of skeletons in the cupboard,—we have all of us living skeletons, who confront us at the club, who jostle us in the ball-room, who waylay us in the street; some antipathies, some scarecrows of nature's or our own making, who poison the air

for us, and ever cross the path of our enjoyment. It is not legal to kill them, so day after day they stop our train, and block our carriage, and intrude on the friends we wish to monopolise, and still the great question remains as to whether a future state will be also dimmed by their accursed presence.

Mrs. Harker from her barouche, "the cynosure of neighbouring eyes," dispensed her smiles and nods to the richest and most distinguished of the county gentry. With Mr. Cantelupe she had a long badinage, the most playful and arch that can be conceived; and Lord Mazagan's gallant compliments she returned with interest, darting them back in the direction of his nephew, whose horse and equipment she found, as she expressed it in the most lady-like French, "*tootarfay parfay*," and the whole scene "*charmong, biang charmong*." The grace with which she hung one hand, cased in a primrose glove, over the side of the barouche as she fondled Ethel with the other, was a study for a sculptor—especially a sculptor of the present day. Mr. Frith would have made several dainty pictures out of such material. Jack Talbot, who, with his puffy little clean shaven face, as usual strictly guarded by a stiff, crisp all-round white collar, sat on a clever Irish horse he had picked up when his

regiment was camped on the Curragh, calmly smoking the butt end of a cheroot in a sort of protesting way, thought differently, for the reflection which shot across his mind, just an inch below his lips, was,—

“Cursed old humbug; I hope Fitz won’t be fool enough to marry that tall Harker girl. I’d take that little governess now if she’d only a thousand.”

Self confident Jack! that little trim city there, so unconscious of its possible besiegers, was not to be taken so easily. That fort they call a heart needed better heart and brains than yours, my *blasé* friend, to storm it.

Fashionable to the last extremity was the little velvet arrangement, called by courtesy a bonnet, on Mrs. Harker’s astute head. Fashionable her Indian shawl, with its glistening humming-bird colours; from the finest loom came her gown; exquisite as a prize azalia was the little rose-coloured parasol trimmed with Mechlin lace, that she held over her head to improve her complexion, and to intercept Heaven’s scanty gifts of sunshine; but hard was her visage, lined by social intrigues and diplomatic disappointments (for new money gets its homage tempered by many snubs from pride, envy, and malice), and her griping mouth was depressed by years of unrepressed temper.

The hard hyæna-like smile, that she beguiled herself into believing so winning and so gracious, had a certain charm that deserved praise, as a tolerably successful struggle against nature. But it had one drawback, that cold, keen-eyed persons could not, and did not, indeed, try to overlook, and that was, that it revealed certain golden glimpses of art's handiwork, that gave one somehow an impression of half-concealed machinery, the work of Midas partially accomplished; and silent satirists at dinner parties wondered to themselves in the pause after the soup, whether, as time prosecuted its blotting out of youth, the teeth would not all turn to gold, in the Ogress manner. But enough of a repulsive woman; enough of this imperfect and marred image of the Eve of the world's daybreak.

Cantelupe, it must be confessed, and even Julia Beauflower tacitly allowed it, satirical as she was about the Harkers and their "royal chariot," looked very alert and handsome in his well made scarlet coat, white cords, and perfect top-boots. He and Clinker looked quite ready for business, and bound to be in the first flight.

"Well, Tom," said he, to his huntsman, "what do you think of Mr. Harker's horse? Do you think he'll go?"

"What, that bay with the white stocking? I

don't know about going, sir ; but he's strong ; he can do the work if he likes. I saw him the last time we was out, leap that brook down by Pitt House in first class style ; but Lord, he won't come near you. Clinker can give him half a mile start across grass land, he'd beat you though in going in dirt."

"He can't go the steeplechase pace?"

"Ha, sir, but Whalebone was the one for timber."

"Come, Clinker's pretty well at most games, but Varnish was cleverer at water."

"Do you look there, sir," said Tom. "I'm blessed if that chestnut mare with the short shoulders, isn't a sight too much for Miss Harker. She's afraid of her, that's it, sir ; and the mare, bless you, knows it, and is cutting her capers. The lady has no seat, Mr. Cantelupe ; if she was to try and follow us, she'd be left in the first ditch as sure as my name's Tom Burton. Now she's upon her hind legs like a horse at a circus ; blow me, but it will be a good many miles before she'll have the steel taken out of her."

Tom Burton was quite correct ; in fact, to do him justice, he was seldom wrong—about horses. The chestnut mare was desperately fresh, and she knew her power. Miss Harker, always a timid and fussy horsewoman (for courage cannot

be learnt from Kensington riding masters), had been frightened on first mounting that morning, and had never recovered her nerve. Much as she wished to show off, she dreaded the throw off far too much to wish to prolong the rather painful and doubtful pleasure. Her nose got redder, the flesh round her eyes more contracted; her mouth pinched every moment as she saw Cantelupe riding by Amy's side, and speaking in a dangerously low voice, which made Amy cast down her eyes, and reply in rather nervous monosyllables. The Devil, always on duty in our hearts, saw his opportunity, and seized it with the leap of a soft-footed leopard. It would look well to surrender the mare to Amy, who was so fond of riding. The whole field would see the generous self-sacrifice, and praise the heart that prompted it; and if—and if the mare *should* prove restive, and Amy was thrown,—well, she did not care to pursue that absurd line of thought, or imagine anything so shocking. At all events, one person would be saved, and it might as well be the one whose life was most valuable. So she trotted up to Amy, and at once proposed the exchange.

“Oh, I could not, really, Miss Harker,” said poor innocent Amy; “you’d never like poor tame little Puss; but oh, it is so kind and generous of you.”

Then secretly she taxed herself for having thought unworthily of Caroline Harker. Ethel was delighted.

"Oh, I'm so glad, Amy, you'll delight in Firefly; she gallops lovely; but you must let her have her head. She frets if you pull at all, as Carry will keep doing."

Mr. Harker approved of the change. "Carry has rather a heavy hand on a bridle," he said to his wife, as he mounted his own horse; "though she's a very good horsewoman generally."

Mrs. Harker in secret earnestly hoped that the little paltry girl the gentlemen made so much fuss about, would have some slight accident that would take down her vanity, and make her afraid to try and rival Carry again.

"Take great care," she said, with friendly malice to Amy, "you're sure you're not afraid of a real horse."

"Oh no, Mrs. Harker; I love horses. I shall enjoy a canter home on Firefly. I was never on her before. Now, Ethel, I feel I'm really going to ride, but yet Puss is a dear, darling thing. Don't laugh at me, Julia, if I'm run away with."

It was a remarkable fact, that promptly as Beauflower threw the reins to his sister, and leaped from the pony-carriage, he arrived just a moment too late to help Miss Harker from her

horse, and just in time to help Amy, who seemed pleased at his kind promptitude.

It is a momentary act to help a lady on horse-back, yet perhaps there is nothing so pleasant and so self-rewarding as that small act of chivalrous attention. How pleasant to grasp a little dainty foot, cleared from the habit, and to feel the soft pressure of the hand upon one's shoulder of the dainty horsewoman, as she vaults into her saddle, light as a feather.

Miss Harker would not have blushed at the natural politeness of a gentleman as Amy did, who was so young, and so unaccustomed to homage.

"Artful little hussy," hissed the inward voice of Mrs. Harker. "I wish I'd never set eyes on her. Every one is after her. There's that fool, young Cantelupe, looking as if he could eat Mr. Beauflower because he was there first to help her up."

"She does look so nice," said Julia to her brother, as he came near the carriage where Dr. Briscoe stood sentinel.

"Yes, she has a natural taste for riding. How well she sits. The mare does not fidget half so much now, you see."

"How this young fellow, Cantelupe, is running through his money. What a pity it is," said the

doctor. "Harker tells me these hounds cost him nearly a thousand guineas, and the expenses of this pack, with the fourteen horses, are never less than two thousand a year. Then there's his Leicestershire expenses. I expect he's over head and ears too in mortgages with Harker. There'll be a break-up some day. He's going too fast—he must come to grief."

Travers just then rode up on a bony and coffin-headed black horse, touched his hat to Mrs. Harker and the family in a brusque and almost contemptuous way, and then pushed on to shake hands with half a dozen farmers he wanted to invite to a day's shooting.

Great red hands were thrust out to the fellow in every direction, and peals of coarse laughter broke forth wherever he came. Young Brown alone did not greet him, but rode in another direction.

"That is the most detestable fellow," said Beauflower, bitterly; "but I wonder, doctor, why young Brown and he don't put up horses together."

"Well, there was a little scuffle yesterday in the covert, Birdbrook way, I hear, and Travers swears young Brown was one of the lot, though the men didn't see his face."

"I'm afraid he'll give his father some trouble."

“He rides very straight,” said the doctor, refusing to take the moral point of view; “no man gets better to hounds; but he’s got such a great raw horse, and he crams him at everything. I should like to see him on that little roan horse of Harker’s that the groom’s leading. That’s a stepper—hundred guinea horse. Harker is steady; he takes the lowest places. He’s not a bruising rider, like Lord Mazagan used to be. He actually flew a lane once;—fact. Ha! my fine fellows.” Here the doctor surveyed the men in scarlet with a sweep of the eye and a fox and the grapes bitterness. “Before they come on the open there’s a brook in the fifth field down there, just by the turning to Swallowcliff, a regular stopper, that will wash out the starch of some of you.”

The doctor was quite loquacious in his delight.

“And much you care, Dr. Briscoe,” said Julia. “You surely don’t want to drown them because you can’t join them.”

“Not I, Miss Julia Beauflower; broken collar-bones would do me more good. I should like to have a fling at the brook myself; though I dare say I should get in, for sober John, here, isn’t what he was, and the road has rather hurt his feet. Did you observe, Beauflower, how red Harker turned when that man Travers rode by? I’m sure he doesn’t like the rascal, and yet for some reason or

other can't get rid of him. I wonder what the reason is. How the wind's taken your face, Beauflower."

It was not the wind; it was that sleek, dunning, always impecunious Mr. Pitts, whose inquiring eye from his light cart just then caught the Vicar's. That was Mr. Beauflower's skeleton, and by its side sat a red-faced, hearty country girl, gazing open-mouthed at the whole scene, for Lord Mazagan was just then artistically waving the dogs into the covert, which in an instant seemed to swallow the whole forty couple.

In a moment every cigar was thrown away; one or two farmers took a sup from their pocket-flasks; Jack Talbot topped off a spoonful of curaçoa. Every one arranged his bridle, looked at his stirrups, and put himself together. The dogs would soon find. They always found here, the covert wasn't too close for them, so they could soon shake Reynard out. The grooms with the led horses began to arrange for a strike across country to good points for meeting their masters. The outsiders drew back, and the few carriages and carts receded some twenty yards, to leave a clear course when the crash came.

And now for a special metaphor. You may bring up an eagle on bread crumbs, and even teach him to take them out of your children's

hands, but be sure, if you carry him up a mountain, and cast him out to the cross lightning and the storm, that the bird will spread forth his great broad wings and launch forth at once into the tempest with all the rapture of freedom. So it was that the Nimrod of Oriel, the hard rider of Oxford in the old times, felt his eyes sparkle and his blood warm, as he saw the preparations for the noble pastime that chivalry still glories in, and he began chanting in a low voice to Julia, to whom Amy had been chatting, Kingsley's fierce verses—for the young Vicar himself was, to a degree, a quiet disciple of muscular Christianity, and gloried in trampling under foot the too prevalent effeminacy of his profession. It is not the prerogative of the rich Norman alone to relish the joys of hunting.

“Forward! hark forward! the cry!
 One more fence, and we're out on the open;
 So to us at once if you want to live near us!
 Hark to them, ride to them beauties! as on they go,
 Leaping and sweeping away in the vale below!
 Cowards and bunglers, whose heart or whose blood is slow,
 Find themselves staring alone.”

Perhaps the dashing verses of the aggressive Christian stirred the blood of the chestnut mare too; certain it is that her eyes reddened and stared, she began snorting like a war-horse, and scratching at the ground, and rearing in a way

that rather alarmed Julia Beauflower, and made Amy silent and watchful, but not the least nervous, for her feelings were equable and sustained, never coming in rash gusts or unreasoning impulses. She felt that the mare required unceasing care, but she had no fear or distrust of herself, riding being, like most other things, she thought, chiefly a matter of common sense.

Beauflower stepped out of his carriage, and going up to Amy, and patting the chestnut's neck, said, in a low, earnest voice,—

“You are not afraid?”

“Oh, no, thank you.”

“Shall I hold her when the *hounds* give tongue, or will you dismount?”

“Oh, no, Mr. Beauflower, I can quite hold her. She's only restless for a moment. I can get a little behind, and she'll see less there.”

“Do. She's very restless to-day, and Ju is rather frightened about her.”

The road where they were skirted the covert side. It commanded a view of the high sloping fields that stretched up to the sloe bushes, brambles, dead fern and hazel, that were studded here and there with low-growing oak trees.

“Hark in, hark!” cried Lord Mazagan, with a slight cheer, and a wave of his hunting-cap, for he was alive now, and all the insincere tripping

jauntiness of the mere lady's man was put away far out of sight. In a few minutes the gorse that bordered the wood shook fretfully and inquiringly. Then one or two restless hounds appeared bounding over some stubborn and thorny bushes they could not penetrate, and their hanging ears and spotted sides speckled the edge of the cover for a moment. Two minutes more and one old hound, keen as an Indian on the war trail, slipped out of cover, took a short turn to and fro outside, his nose down, his tail lashing his side, hoping to catch some scent that his companions had overlooked. The second whipper-in not relishing this wandering from the text, gave one crack of his whip, with a—

“Rattler, Rattler, where are you going, Rattler? Get to cover, Rattler.”

Rattler leaped back. Five minutes more, “No fox!” cried the novices and the impatient.

“Patience,” cried Tom Burton, prophetically; “they are drawing it beautifully.”

That very instant the cover shook—shook wildly. Every stem was alive; to use Nimrod's words, “it was waving like a corn field in the wind.”

The sterns of the hounds “flourished” as they do when dogs feel a scent, but are unwilling as yet to fully acknowledge it.

"Have at him there!" shouted Tom Burton, and as he shouted the gorse went mad with hounds leaping over each other's backs to get on the scent.

"Have at him there again; a fox for a hundred!" shouted Lord Mazagan, putting one finger to his right ear, and uttering a scream like the screech of a scalded witch. Jack Talbot coolly looked at his watch, "fifteen past eleven," whilst Cantelupe, Harker, and some other of the prompt ones stole round to a point where the fox was likely to break.

"Hold hard!" cried Tom Burton, "stand still, gentlemen, pray stand still!"

Call to Niagara to stop, call to a falling avalanche! Those hitherto procrastinating or phlegmatic drew on gloves, threw away cigars, gathered up their bridle reins handy, pushed their hats well down on their foreheads. There was an undulation of scarlet coats here and there. "'Ware hounds," cried the second whipper-in. "Give them time, gentlemen," shouted Tom. There was a faint, dreamy whimper in the cover, it was from a noted finder, "Jupiter." Lord Mazagan cheered him. In an instant another hound challenged him, then another, and another. "Tally-ho," cried a keeper's boy, in a pollard oak. "He's gone!" cried Cantelupe, and with a bound he was in the first rank.

"Stand still, pray stand still," shouted Tom Burton.

"That's right, overrun the scent," said an old farmer, contemptuously.

"No hurry," cried Dr. Briscoe.

"Go along," shouted Lord Mazagan, "there are four couple on the scent."

In a moment the more outlying hounds shot through the crowd of horses and joined the leaders. You could cover the fine pack now with a table cloth, every stern down, every head up; the scent was breast high. No music after the first crash, one in a dozen only throwing his tongue to rouse the laggards. Away, in a torrent of scarlet, flew the riders. The pace was good, it was a terrible burst. The wild hunt passed like a flash of scarlet lightning over that high, straggling hedge at the bottom of the first turnip field. The dogs were already two fields off, and on the fallows. Two men were down at that double rail. Somebody says "Jack Talbot has had an ugly spill;" one riderless horse seems chasing the whole flying army before him; some one remarks "that it looks like Bob Brown's black mare."

"They're taking a good line of country, doctor," said Beauflower, whose heart beat faster with that grand excitement, which only that of a battle can equal. He said it wistfully.

"Now I'm sure, Vicar," said the doctor, "you would like to be with them."

"Yes, and in the first flight," replied Beauflower, frankly. "There's no harm in avowing that, but I shall never hunt again. Quite apart from having no horse, and being too proud to ride other people's, I do not think a clergyman in these days of conflict has a right to waste a whole day once a week in mere amusement ; but, dear, me that mare of Miss Robinson's is too much for her. That fool of a groom ought to hold her. Good God ! there will be an accident if she doesn't take care."

The mare was indeed too much for Amy. She had by degrees, just before the hunt, fidgeted and fretted, and curvetted through the spectators collected behind the carriages, and was now on her hind legs, staring with reddened eyes at the receding horsemen, and striking out with her fore feet, impatient of restraint. Amy looked anxiously at Ethel and Julia, but she was perfectly cool, and kept her seat with a calm courage that was her peculiar gift. But the mare, roused to madness by seeing Beauflower run to seize its bridle, at that moment gave a frantic bound, more like a leopard than a horse, rose again almost erect in the air, and then broke into a maddened gallop across country in a straight line

for the hounds. Amy's hat fell off as the mare rose at the first fence, but she kept her seat bravely, and as she swept on over the farther fields, her bridle was as powerless to restrain the mare, as a gut line would be to hold a shark.

A cry of terror broke from the ladies, even Miss Harker turned pale, and held her breath. Julia and Ethel screamed.

"Gracious heavens!" said the doctor, "she'll be killed. They're making straight for Warrington Brook, and it's swollen with Monday's rain. Beauflower, something must be done, Beauflower!"

But Beauflower was gone. In a moment he had pushed Miss Harker's groom from his saddle, and sprang upon the horse. In another moment he had put himself together, pressed his hat down over his eyes, thrown off his dark-grey paletot, seized the doctor's heavy whip, and striking his heels into the horse's sides, galloped straight to the fence which the last horseman was just clearing.

"Now, that's a true man!" said the doctor, enthusiastically, as he strained his eyes to watch the pursuer and the pursued.

Ethel was crying violently, Julia was in raptures with her brother.

"I always said there was something between them. Come, come, Carry," said Mrs. Harker,

the inexorable, to her daughter, who had turned rather faint, "there's no danger ; it'll teach the girl not to show off her riding again. Come, don't let us have a scene ; all the people are looking."

The groom who fought Paddy was staring in stupid admiration at Beauflower's promptitude, and at his good style of riding, when the doctor came up and asked him if he thought the fox was making for Warrington Brook.

"They're taking a splendid line, sir, but that brook's a reglar stopper ; that's where old Highfield was drowned, no the fox won't take it unless he's hard pressed ; more likely make for Charford Bottom, and so work round to Swallowcliff. They lost there last Friday. I hope that young lady, sir, will be able to pull the mare in before Mr. Beauflower comes near. She's such a violent temper that she'll never let anything come up to her. I told Miss Carry she hadn't ought to ride such a 'oss, but she would have it, and this is what it's come to."

"I am terribly afraid the poor dear girl will come to grief," thought Dr. Briscoe, as he rode slowly across the fields, "but I can't afford to break my neck pursuing her, whatever others do. I'm too old for that."

It is not the persons who boldly own their selfishness who are the most selfish. The mare

had not struggled more violently with Amy, than the doctor's warm heart was just then struggling with him, urging him to hurry to the rescue in case danger should ensue. His horse, too, seemed to share in the excitement that was darting from nerve to nerve of his master. The doctor trotted back to Mrs. Harker's carriage.

"No lady ought ever to have been allowed to get on such a beast as that," he said, testily; "it's shameful, it's homicide. I think I had better ride slowly towards them; in case of an accident, my services——"

"Oh, pray go and see, dear doctor," said Julia, imploringly.

The doctor rode slowly for twenty yards, then he trotted, then he cantered, then he galloped till some twenty yards from the first fence he pushed his horse to full speed, and cleared the hedge like a bird.

"That girl infatuates every one she comes near," said Mrs. Harker, spitefully. "The people couldn't be more anxious about the little chit if she was the Queen herself. John," but John the groom was already beyond hearing, he was just riding at his third fence, not twenty yards behind the worthy doctor, who was riding like Osbaldiston himself, and making straight and bold as a lion, for the well-known "stopper."

"I'll discharge that man to-morrow," said Mrs. Harker, indignant at any even involuntary outburst of humanity, when it ran counter to middle class etiquette.

For four fields Beauflower had not caught a glimpse of Amy. At the fifth fence, a drop into a lane, he saw one of her gloves and a little white pocket-handkerchief that blew struggling from a dead thistle on the field side. In a heavy bit of plough beyond he met young Brown, red and angry, pursuing his runaway horse. Yes, Miss Robinson had gone on—she was riding steadily, but the mare was evidently too much for her; she had dropped her whip by the fence in the brook field.

Beauflower flew on. Death was, perhaps, waiting by the brook side to claim its destined victim. He drew his horse steady, drove his own feet low in the stirrups, and flew at the tall fence where it seemed most broken. The horse, tormented by the thorny boughs through which he forced his head, landed badly on a slippery clay bank, and fell, but not badly. Beauflower fell and rose with his horse. He was shaken, and plastered with clay down the left side of his head and his black coat. A thorn branch, too, had brought blood from his right cheek, and the blood and clay together made him resemble a hunted cavalier.

And now through the next thick fence, where there was a gap broken, he caught sight of Amy. She was alone, and the mare was making straight for the brook that ran between two banks, with here and there a pollard willow or a patch of osiers. It flowed at the bottom of a grass field, with a dozen acres or so of green young wheat beyond.

A dozen horsemen were streaming over the brow of the wheat field, while three or four more, who had been in the brook, were catching their horses or mounting them rather ruefully, and as fast as possible under the circumstances. Before Beauflower could gallop half down the field, the chestnut mare, roused by the sound of pursuing hoofs, flew at the water, here about fourteen feet wide. Unfortunately it took off at a bad place, where the opposite bank was rather higher than the one it quitted. To Beauflower's horror it came down with only its front feet on the bank, scrambled for a footing, then fell sideways into the water. One bound brought Beauflower to the brook; leaping off his horse, and leaving it to go or remain at its will, he dashed into the flood, with a shout of encouragement to Amy, who, pale as death, was clinging to the horn of her saddle, from which she had at last been shaken, and for the moment buoyed up by the

floating of her habit. The mare, madly pawing at the bank, which it struck down in showers of earth, was every moment threatening to break from the now fainting girl, or to strike her dead with a blow of its hoofs. There was no one to help, but Beauflower had not been to Eton for nothing; he struck out boldly to her, and called to her to encourage her to leave the horse, but the noise of the splashing prevented her hearing him. Next he seized the mare's bridle, and forced her back from the bank to a lower and shallower place, where she scrambled on shore, and dashed off at once after the dogs. Then, as Amy fell back fainting in his arms, Beauflower loosened her hand from the saddle, and swam with her to where the low branch of a pollard willow gave him a leverage to assist him in helping her out. Just then the good doctor, pounding along to the rescue, gave a war whoop of mingled delight and alarm when he saw the chivalrous young Vicar emerge like a water god from the brook, with Amy insensible and dripping like Ophelia in his arms. In an instant the doctor leaped off his horse and began chafing her hands with all the fondness and anxiety of a father. He put one hand to her heart, and then bent his head as if he was listening to a stethoscope. Beauflower waited with passionate eagerness for his words.

"Thank God! she is still alive," he said, as he rose from his knees. "Chafe one hand while I chafe the other."

Beauflower did so, but she did not revive. Once only she half lifted her eyelids, moaned the words "save me," and then again fainted.

"There is danger if this state of collapse continues," said the doctor, anxiously. "I must ride back with her to the carriage, and get her home as soon as possible. Here's the groom coming; you can take his horse, Beauflower, and let him catch yours. He's a good lad for coming. I dare say it was against orders, for that Harker woman has no more heart than a mill-stone. Just hold Amy while I look and see if I haven't a bottle of smelling salts in some side-pocket, and then help me up with her. I must go round by the gates, and you must ride forward and open them for me."

There lay Amy, white as a marble statue. Can we pardon the Vicar if, as the doctor turned to get at his pocket, intercepting for a moment the view of the groom, who was dashing up in hot haste, like a moss-trooper late for a rising on the border, he stooped and pressed the little ice cold mouth with his glowing lips. Certain it is that he himself felt guilty of felony, for he instantly became absorbed in trying to lift Amy gently in his

arms. The doctor got into the saddle, and Amy was lifted up before him. Under this kind convoy she was soon placed in the carriage, to Mrs. Harker's secret annoyance, for she was very wet, and she, and her daughter, and Ethel, had to get out and walk. Soon, under the care of the worthy housekeeper and Ethel, who had been crying ever since the mare ran away, Amy revived, and in a warm bed, and with proper restoratives, was soon convalescent enough to hear of her escape, and to blush at the name of her rescuer, with whose courage and promptitude the whole of Summerleas was already ringing.

"Well, how is this young lady?" said Mr. Harker, coldly, to Dr. Briscoe, the next morning, as he met the worthy man descending the stairs that led to Amy's bed-room. "It might have been a serious accident."

"*Might* have been," said the doctor, rather drily. "I think it was. Another moment and the mare would have drowned her as sure as if a ruffian had been holding her down. She never ought to have been allowed to ride that savage mare. She is young still, poor girl, at riding. She's wonderful to-day considering, but she's weak with the reaction still. If we can only fend off rheumatic fever she'll do now, but it may perhaps, any way, lead to a slight derangement of the heart."

"If you please, sir," said the tiger, handing a card he had just received from a mounted man at the door, "the Honourable Mr. Cantelupe has sent over to ask how Miss Robinson is, and here's a boy, too, from Miss Chivers to ask how she is."

"Say she's much better, but not yet out of danger," said the doctor.

"The girl will, no doubt," said Mrs. Harker to herself that morning when she heard of the message from the Castle, on her way downstairs to the breakfast table, after a formal visit with her daughter to Amy, whose side Ethel and Julia could scarcely be prevailed upon to leave, "have a romantic attachment for the man who fished her out. I must foster that, or that young fool of a spendthrift will fall in love with her, and jilt my Carry, after all."

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. BASSEVI VISITS THE VICARAGE.

WORTHY old Mrs. Beauflower was subject to paroxysms of house-cleaning. It conduced to no one's comfort; indeed her son sometimes lost his temper for a moment, and loudly asserted that it conduced to quite the reverse. Not that the Vicar disliked cleanliness, which is generally supposed, according to the axiom, to live next door to godliness; but that these storms of scrubbing and washing were all works of supererogation, for they often took place when the house was as clean as silver and fresh as a pink. Some people had a theory (originated by Dr. Briscoe), that they were "for mortification," on the principle which makes a Jesuit a casuist, when he utters these words under-breath, and calls his host's bad dinner a good one. Others, and amongst this class of thinkers was Miss Chivers, held that they were assertions of power, and were not meant to have any result, except as assertions. A third class of social theo-

rists contended, and Julia Beauflower unfurled her banner at the head of them, that these cleanings were not practical, but were intended to keep the servants out of idleness, just as martinet captains, during calms and lulls, set the men to polish the ballast iron. A nervous, careful, and over-anxious temperament had in excellent Mrs. Beauflower been so fostered by the indulgence of a husband who did not care, and subsequently of a good-natured son, who did not wish to rule, that it had grown into a sort of domestic mania, which like all other manias had its feverish fits and lucid intervals. Its symptoms were, servants looking cross, strange noises, raps and knockings; passages blocked with furniture, dinners unpunctual and badly cooked; strong smells of soap-suds, bees' wax, gin, turpentine, and furniture polish; draughts from open doors and windows, and damp vapours from wet stairs. Never was a small result obtained with so much inconvenience; and, after all, it was "gilding refined gold," for a house can't be cleaner than clean. Its more alarming symptoms were Mrs. Beauflower refusing to go for a walk, being "very busy about the house," being "very anxious to get breakfast, dinner, &c., over" (instead of calmly enjoying those short truces from trouble), being "very angry with the way that Susan

had been going on about the work," and vivid descriptions (especially when a servant was in the room, of the work got through by some fabulous demi-god of the kitchen, fifty years before, in some paradisaical "early living, Ned, of your father's." Perhaps Mrs. Beauflower's brightest dream of impossible happiness was the getting her son to go away for a couple of weeks, and then doing up the house from top to toe, and taking down all Ned's books; but this was too glorious a vision to be often realised, and Mrs. Beauflower's worthy son took good care it should not be. It was one special feature of the too zealous lady's housekeeping that the more work the servants had to do, the more she heaped upon them fresh tasks, and at all times of special emergency she ingeniously contrived to throw them into a state of secret mutiny and discontent. Too intent on rule and task-setting to remember the weakness of human nature, she quite forgot that no work is so well and so quickly done as willing work. She forgot that slaving all day at petty monotonous occupations (half of them unnecessary) is not the ideal of even Cinderella's life. She forgot, also, that servants were now educated persons, and were no longer the patient drudges that she had known in her youth. Of this last secret she had, however, perhaps some faint glim-

mering, for she often lamented the increased education of servants, that enabled them to read every letter that was left about, and induced them to thumb the drawing-room books, when they ought to be doing up the room. It did not, therefore, surprise the Vicar, when, one morning, after breakfast, about ten days after the terrible adventure at the brook, just as he had retired to his study for a quiet morning's read before his parochial work, there came a dry curt knock at the door, and the two servants entered, Mrs. Baker, the cook, a short-tempered fat person, and Mary, a neat and slim girl, but also with a not altogether dormant spirit under provocation. Mary was crying, a fact chiefly evidenced by her pressing her right eye with the extreme left-hand corner of her blue apron. The cook, being a widow, and decidedly some distance in the vale, was the spokeswoman.

"If you please, sir," she said, "I and Mary wishes to give warning this day month as is reglar, being so chivied about by missus, all about a muffin plate the cat cracked three weeks ago, and which came to pieces this morning in loo warm water (for I tried it with my finger), that we don't know arf our time whether we stand on our 'ed or our 'eels. Not that we've the least fault to find with you, sir, and Miss Julia (who's the sweetest young lady), as I said not ten

minutes ago to Mary here, which was reciprocated; but it's impossible to bear missus any longer, and we begs this to be for warning this day month, being put no confidence in. There's George, sir, he's taken on so about missus's ways, that he's been drinking."

Mary nodded, and expressed complicity.

At that very moment, Julia, suspecting mischief, put her smiling face in at the door.

"Julia, dear," said the Vicar, "just take and have a talk with Mrs. Baker and Mary here, they have got some foolish notion into their heads about going, because they say they're driven so about. I'm sure mother's quite satisfied with them, it is only her way sometimes. You women must bear with her."

"Come with me, you silly things," said Julia, and led them away, in her coaxing and irresistible manner, to send them off to their work in five minutes, satisfied with themselves, and content even with old Mrs. Beauflower's slave-driving and suspicions. With the best intentions in the world, that old lady had the special knack at times of rendering every one supremely miserable. A true woman general in this, that not content with leading her forces into action, she wanted, also, to help drive the baggage cart, and load the cannon. Instead of sitting in the centre of her

domestic factory, surveying the whole like a spider from the centre of its web, she must needs, in the morbid over-anxiety of her restricted and over-worked thoughts, run about greasing the cogs of wheels, and testing the strength of the driving bands.

Just as the Vicar was beating through the index of an enormous St. Augustine, to see what traces of Mariolatry he could find in that most practical of the Fathers, in came Mr. Goodrick, just arrived from London, and on his way from Slobury to Fontford with an architect, who had gone on in the fly, leaving Mr. Goodrick to follow, as he wished, on foot. He was full of Amy's accident, of which he had heard by a letter from Beauflower. He spoke of her with all the glowing affection of a father. Having just called at the Abbey to inquire, he had found, to his great delight, that Amy was down that day for the first time; the nervous fever had left her weak, but she was fast recovering.

"Those Harkers," he said, indignantly, "are, I really believe, angry at the constant inquiries from Lord Mazagan, young Cantelupe, and all the gentlemen of the hunt who live within six or seven miles. The saucy jackanapes of a footman, obeying orders, no doubt, said he *believed* Miss was nearly well now, and that is all I should have

heard, if Ethel had not just then come bounding downstairs to pick some violets for Amy. That Mrs. Harker ought to have been the wife of a Carolina slave owner."

Having thus vented his indignation, Mr. Goodrick complimented Beauflower warmly on his promptness and courage, of which the county papers had been full; he had heard it mentioned, too, by some farmers as he came down in the train.

Beauflower waived the compliments. "Who wouldn't have done the same?" he said; "there was no danger except from the mare struggling, and the bank being rather slippery. Well, and did you send the jewels to the Berlin exhibition?"

"No, they are to go in May; the thing is put off by the special wish of Count Bismarck. But you seem worried?"

"Well, I am, our servants have just given warning. My dear mother follows them about so, and is so suspicious—she *will* overdo it. Her mind is always fretting on small domestic troubles; something cracked, or scratched, or scorched, which to her seems one of the signs of the Last Day."

"Old story, good old soul! Servants are not like bees, they won't work in glass hives. They

do much better left alone. Women don't see this. Pity she doesn't dismiss domestic things sometimes from her mind, and unbend like Miss Chivers and the doctor at whist."

"But she won't; she likes her voluntary martyrdom, and an account book is her notion of relaxation."

"I've just been reading in the train one of those clever paradoxes on Women's Rights, in the 'Saturday'; mere special pleading, pretending to look for truth, and always finding six on one side, and half-a-dozen on the other. The man whose brain has acquired the art of secreting that kind of article, would prove the murder of Abel justifiable homicide. Yet I like the fellow too, because he ridicules Dr. Mary Walker, and all her lot. 'Bear children and nurse them,' that is my notion of woman's mission. Inferior minds or not, where are the women Newtons, and Shaksperes, and Beethovens? Rubbish! but I see you're busy. Perhaps I'm boring you. The doctrine of Predestination, or any fresh discovery, eh?"

The Vicar confessing he was busy partly agreed with the old cynic about women's mission, which was, he thought, to love and be loved, and to wean man from low and selfish ambitions.

"Which they don't do, having no imagination, and being eminently practical and common-place;

but there, enjoy your illusions, and pursue the phantom of perfect love. Some day it will turn to a cloud as you grasp it, and you, too, will become a poor, despised, despairing cynic, like one of us. Ugh ! Good-bye. I shall be in to tea ; tell your sister to make it specially good, or I shall growl."

So he went, and, as he went, Mary came in with a letter. Miss Julia had opened the bag.

What strange instinct is it that sometimes makes one shudder at the sight of a letter that brings misfortune ; that is indeed a Pandora's casket of evil, without even hope lingering at the bottom. This letter had come like a Shrapnel shell to burst, and scatter misery where it fell. Oh pleasant vices of youth, from which the Gods make our scourges. Flowers of past folly had turned to nettles for Beauflower—nettles that the golden scythe of tardy prudence could never mow down fast enough. Hydra-like, the mischief grew, and cast its perennial seed. This letter was an application from the solicitor of a livery stable-keeper, in Carfax Lane, Oxford, announcing his retirement from business, and the necessity of the instant payment of 30*l.* 14*s.* 6*d.*, the residue of a bill of 64*l.* 12*s.* 6*d.* for the hire of horses, dog-carts, and tandems, in the years 1852—53, and the further sum of 60*l.*, being interest at 20 per

cent., as agreed upon at the last payment. The letter was curt, sharp, and insolent, treating the matter as a disgrace that might be exposed, and trying to rouse at once the pride and the fears of the debtor. The items were made out with that severe deliberation with which cheating tradesmen often cover their exactions and their lies, but no memory could go back to such a mass of details, seven and eight years before, the first two years of Beauflower's Oxford folly, long since bitterly repented of. He had already referred this bill several times to his cousin, and always received the same answer. "The bill is exorbitant, you have paid part of it, it is more than six years old. Plead the statute of limitations ;" but his pride, and chivalrous sense of honour recoiled from this step ; he would avoid no fair debts, and besides, the interest, however exorbitant, had been agreed to by him four years before, when he paid part. Often since he had thought of this nightmare, but with all the claims upon him, his charities, and his insurance, had been compelled to again and again defer payment. His income was like a turpentine tree, the moment a cup full of it collected he had to empty it out and wait for the next supply. It was that worst of all incomes, an unimprovable one.

Bitter slavery of debt. Fast chained to the

invisible galley, Conscience scourging us at our profitless toil in that glutinous sea of bird-lime where the ship makes no progress. This debtor was the sufferer in a worse purgatory than Dante ever trod. Come what may, he would throw this greedy lawyer some sop to stay his barking, but where to get it? He opened a private drawer in his knee desk, and took out his cheque-book; in taking it from the drawer a circular dropped out. The circular was headed :—

“CROWN IMPERIAL FIRE AND LIFE INSURANCE
OFFICE.

“NEW BRIDGE STREET, BLACKFRIARS,
LONDON, E.C., *20th October, 1860.*”

and ran thus :—

“SIR,

I am directed to inform you that the annual premium of 47*l.* 0*s.* 0*d.* on your policy, No. 3014, for the insurance of 2000*l.* on the life of yourself, will become due on the 1st of December next; and that if the same be not paid within 30 days from that date the policy will become void.

“I am, Sir,

“Your most obedient servant,

“JOSIAH WILLOUGHBY.

“*Actuary and Secretary.*”

“REV. E. BEAUFLOWER.”

Cured of extravagance, yet still thoughtless about money, Beauflower had thrust this notice into a drawer and forgotten it; now it seemed to fall upon him like the axe of a guillotine. It must be paid, or all the money put by to eke out his sister's and mother's small income in case of his death, would be forfeited. Seven years' payments lost as if they had been thrown into the deep sea. Already his vivid imagination pictured to himself their pining misery, the wretched garret in some country town, where they sat weeping for him, and praying to Heaven for bread. A thousand tormenting thoughts environed him, and shot at his heart their little poisonous and corroding shafts. A brooding darkness fell over the present, and a coffin blackness over the future. Hope for the moment seemed a mere will-o'-the-wisp, sent to allure men into sloughs of despair, and to leave them there with pitiless mockery. A miserable lawyer had the power to sneer at, insult him, even (unless help came) drag him to prison, a degraded heart-broken man, and he was powerless, for his own youthful folly had forged the very chains that were even then eating into his flesh. Pay the 30*l.*, clutch the receipt, and bright freedom would come once more, and he would again breathe, and look, and feel like other people, and no one could point at, threaten or

ridicule, the helplessness of his poverty, the false pretences of the clergyman who had plunged into debt, and who was a man for safe and prudent people to avoid as if he had the plague. Who should he go to? to his cousin? no, that was too bitter a mortification. To receive a half reluctant dole of some hard earned money,—the reluctance but ill concealed; and, perhaps, a look of surprise and reproof, or, what was still more unbearable, a homily on improvidence, and a caution not to throw upon a cousin soon about to marry the whole burden of aiding the income of his mother and sister. No, that, to a man naturally proud, and hitherto accustomed to independence, was unbearable. Better those harpies the Jews, and 100 per. cent., than that. What other remedy was there? His rich, eccentric, but too new friend, Mr. Goodrick, who seemed so rich, but perhaps had no money beyond just enough to cover his lavish expenses? to be refused, or met with a cynical remark that “lending loses both itself and friend, and borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry,” or the lancet edge of some less trite but equally keen quotation; no, it was not to be thought of. He had no right to ask the man, the mere friend of an old friend of his father, the man who seemed so expensive in his tastes and was yet so thrifty. Young Cantelupe, his

former pupil, who threw hundreds away on every race course, who ordered down half-a-dozen sets of studs and gold latch keys and locket, (to give to male visitors, or less estimable and more expensive creatures), and who, it was well known in the county, had a gold dressing case almost as large as a plate chest, that two footmen could scarcely carry? Yes, he would sign a cheque in a moment, no doubt, for a cool hundred or two, and think no more of it than if he had put his name to a subscription list for a guinea. But then, was it fair or generous to take advantage of the generous recklessness that was hurrying the young spendthrift, like a wild horse, to ruin. Did not the very lodgekeepers at the Castle know that he was already over head and ears in debt with some Jew money-lender, besides having mortgaged half his estate to Mr. Harker? Was he not said to be trusting blindly to recover (more likely to lose) thousands by his horse Immenschikoff at the next Slobury races, in the forthcoming May? Let alone the conscience of the matter, would it be well that his (the Vicar of Summerleas') name should be hereafter mentioned as that of one of the bloodsuckers that had fastened on this warm-hearted—well, it must be said—young fool? No! he would not put into that port, whatever storm might come. Where else to turn? To Mr. Harker, that

arrogant impersonation of new money, the man who would forfeit Heaven to get a knighthood by presenting an address, or some other task of generous chivalry : the man who so cruelly and selfishly neglected the poor who toiled for him ; who produced by thousands those detestable birds that led men to theft and murder ; who bred game to such sinful excess, that it devastated the lands not only of his own farmers, but of the miserable ground down, hopeless poor ? No ; better starve and beg than ask a man who would either refuse, or treat the loan as a means of cruel exaction and perpetual insult. Yes ; this would be indeed to voluntarily descend into hell : besides, above all, might not this insolent and overbearing man, in his selfish indifference to the feelings of more sensitive people of a finer fibre and higher breeding than his own, talk of the loan to his wife and daughters ; then Amy would hear of it, and he, Beauflower, would appear to her (for he could no longer conceal from himself that he loved her) a miserable improvident beggared borrower, and it was madness even to think of such ineffable disgrace.

Gracious heaven ! ordering so inflexibly all sins to bear apples of Sodom for the future, willing so inflexibly that sin shall only bring forth shame and misery, and that godless pleasure, though sweet for the moment, shall be poison on the morrow.

Was there no help then from these cares, that stood now like ravening lions in his path? Was there no repentance that could be secretly worked out? Would no prayers nor sorrow avail? Must he stand barefooted on the red-hot ploughshares of suffering, mortification, and disgrace? Could no toil of brain devise an escape from this syren's net, this poisoned garment of Nessus, this devil's pit-fall for youth? These bonds, small individually as the Lilliputian threads that held Gulliver, yet, united, were strong and indestructible. Would no angel's sword strike down from the clouds, and, pitying his marred life, his shattered dream, sever this Gordian knot devised by Satan to make him hate life, and curse the day in which it was said "a man child is born." So wrestled the fettered man with the great trouble that was choking out his life; as he buried his pale face in his hands, and some burning tears sprang out upon them.

All at once, like a flash of lightning in a dark night, a flash of hope lit up his gloom. Perhaps he might have fifty pounds left at the Salisbury bank. Some one might have paid in some secret subscription to the Chetwynd fund to his name. He knew he had a slight balance of his own still left. Nothing could be easier, confident, firm as adamant in his own principle as he

was, than to take that money and repay it in January.

Then his tithes were paid, and the first half of his 400*l.* a-year came as sure as sunrise ; no one would be the wiser, and no one would suffer any harm. That was his way of release from this care that was pressing upon his brain and on his heart. He pulled out his keys, opened the right hand top drawer of his knee desk, where all his account books and charity memoranda were, and took out the sealed parcel containing his bankers' book just as it had last arrived by post. Beauflower had never been taught to feel the value of money. His father—good and easy man—had never known it. He had petted his son, and sent him to Eton, where he had no business to go, and where he only learnt to write tame alcaics full of other people's thoughts, and to acquire habits of expenditure beyond his station. He had not looked at the book for three months. He cracked the lavish seal, and tore open the paper like a hungry man searching a wreck for food. Last page. Yes, there were one or two subscriptions.

	£	s.	d.
Rev. Robert Smiles, of Broad Chalk, for C. Fund	15	0	0
Arthur Bradley, Winterbourne	10	0	0
Francis Hopwood, Hindon	5	5	0

And that was all, 30*l.* there. His own balance

was 19*l.* 10*s.* 6*d.* There it was ; it would not leave much, but the bank would not care for once, there would be more subscriptions coming in soon, and January—the end of January—was the time named for those cruel dilapidations coming due. He would write, therefore, a cheque for the 47*l.* due to the insurance office, and send it, there would then be 2*l.* 15*s.* 6*d.* left in the bank, so the balance would not be overdrawn, and he had some 13*l.* to go on with till January, for current expenses.

The air grew bright again, and that sweet pale face that was nearly always before him now, day and night, but had faded and receded during that wrestle with despair, for love shrinks from the sight of care, smiled forth again like a lode star to happiness. The chains had fallen from his hands, like the Philistines' bonds from Samson's wrists, his sorrows had snapped like green withes before his strong hope. The sky was blue and laughing again. The blackness had lifted. He felt no longer like a hunted thief ; he could look straight into any man's face. No trouble would cloud him or weigh upon his heart when the great joy came of seeing Amy next. He had opened his cheque-book, and was just filling in the figures, when Julia came running in. She looked angry.

“ Oh, Ned,” she said.

"Why, dear, how ill you look!"

"Oh, do you know that horrid Mr. Pitts has been so rude to mamma just now in the kitchen, and before all the servants, too?"

"Mr. Pitts? and what about?"

"Yes; when mamma told him the last mutton was tough, he said there was a butcher's saying that mutton was often tough when it came from a butcher that hadn't been paid. In fact, he said, he wanted his money up to June."

The Vicar looked vexed and angry. Were these mortifications never to cease? They were hydra-headed. He answered sharply, "Why didn't you bring me the man's bill? We'll have no more of him. I'll send him the money to-morrow."

"But he's waiting now; says he must have it to-day to pay old Brown for some sheep. He is driven, he says, and so he must drive. Money somehow he must get to-day. He was really quite insolent, Ned, and talked so loud."

"Where's the fellow's bill? I'll pay it at once."

"Don't be angry with me, dear. He said he couldn't keep making out fresh bills; we knew well enough what it was, 12*l.* 6*s.* 2*d.*"

Beauflower wrote the cheque angrily, and thrust it with a roughness unusual to his nature

into his sister's hand. She looked hurt at his irritability. She moved a step or two towards the door. Then she turned and said,—

“And, Ned, mamma wants two pounds. That man from Fontford has come to be paid for the potatoes. He came before, last week when you were out, and we hadn't money enough.”

Beauflower was jaded with these fretting thoughts. It takes a great deal of *healthy* brain-work to tire a man.

“A merry heart goes all the day,
Your sad tires in a mile-a.”

He flew into a momentary passion.

“Every one at my purse,” he said; “leeches that never fill. The only thought of every one here—money, money, from morning till night. I shan't have been an hour quiet before you'll be coming for something else—some paltry bill or other.”

“Ned, dear,” said Julia, surprised at such an unusual display of temper, “how put out you seem this morning. I never knew you speak so sharp to me before. I was obliged to come and tell you. You wouldn't wish people like Pitts to insult mamma, and go about saying they could not get paid. Never mind the two pounds, if you're too busy just now to get the money.”

“I’m not too busy. What is it, two pounds. Here it is—take three, you may want it, and don’t worry me again. There’s the cheque for Pitts. Don’t mind me this morning, Ju, something distresses me.”

Julia looked hurt, but ran down with the money.

Twelve pounds, six, and two, and three pounds! out of the £47 wanted for the insurance. The dark figure came again and sat by his side, Amy’s angel face faded as a rainbow fades. Where was it to be got now? He dared not think of it. “That way madness lies.” Like all men habitually careless in money matters, he rallied his courage, dismissed the care as far as he could from his thoughts, and hoped for some providential deliverance. More subscriptions might come in, or he could even write for them. January was the certain time, and in January his own money was certain. For money from then till July, he must shift as he had shifted before, with no loss of credit or reputation. He could trust his own resolution to repay. Nine years ago it had been different; now the repayment was sure as sunrise, so he struggled in the closing grasp of the horrible *pieuvre* of debt! Degraded in his own eyes, lamenting the miserable follies of the past, young love trampled under his feet, at that hard moment when all the world seemed so

cruel and so selfish, he sat there (staring at the red coals, that seemed to change into horrid faces, mocking at his misery), wishing but not willing—one ceaseless thought, as in incipient insanity, revolving like a wheel in his brain.

In vain Zoe, a favourite kitten, Wasp's capricious playmate, leaped up, purringly, soothingly, in his lap, and tried a thousand pretty tricks, as if sent by some good fairy to wean him from his troubles. It played with his watch-chain, bit at his studs, and at last, meeting no recognition, discovered it had mistaken its man, and curling itself up in a cosy ball, head tucked between its paws, went to sleep.

So deep was the Vicar's reverie just then, that he did not hear two gentle taps at the door; the third aroused him. He cried petulantly, "Come in,"—the wind at the key hole, any trifle, vexed his jaded brain now. It was Mary.

"If you please, sir," she said, "there's a gentleman wants to see you;—he gave me this card."

Beauflower snatched it angrily. It was a vulgar staring glazed card, with the name of—

Mr. Isaac Bassevi,

PICTURE DEALER AND RESTORER,

124A, CHARLOTTE STREET,

FITZROY SQUARE.

"Where have you shown him?"

"In the drawing-room, sir. Missus is in the parlour with Miss Chivers, Miss Julia, and Miss Ethel."

"How is Miss Amy?"

"Oh! much better, sir. She's down to-day for the first time, I heard Miss Ethel say."

"Bassevi! Bassevi!" thought the Vicar, as Mary closed the door. He threw the kitten roughly from him and rose to go downstairs. "I had forgotten. Oh, yes, that's the vulgar Jew picture-dealer, that Goodrick introduced me to. I suppose he has come to see the Cuyp. I wish he had chosen some other day. Bother the fellow."

When he went down, Bassevi was standing with his back to the door, intently examining, apparently with the tip of his nose, a view of Dort by Cuyp, that hung over the fire-place. He turned round as the door opened, and bowed familiarly to the Vicar.

"Not a bad bit of Cuyp," he said, waving his white hat at it; "and I like the frame. But the room's too cold for it; the varnish has got chilled. I suppose you don't have a fire here often. I should advise you to have it cleaned. I could make quite another thing of it. I've got one of the best restorers in London at work for me; and

I never let him use ammonia, for it plays the devil with things."

It was a glorious picture by that most poetical of all Dutchmen except Rembrandt. Cattle, men, clouds, distant towers, and vessels the great painter of Dort had steeped in "the very essence of sunshine" (Hazlitt). In looking at it you forgot all about canvas, fine or rough, brushes, hog or sable, oils, or paint. It seemed a tranquil dream of a golden age, full of a repose, never to be broken; but the cloven-hoofed satyr who was now secretly pricing it, was only thinking of the five pound notes it would fetch, and the way it could be run up by his "puffers" at a London picture-auction. He knew exactly its value as a master-piece, but as for its inner soul of beauty, he regarded that no more than a butcher does the life in the sheep he is dragging into the slaughter-house door.

"So you think it a genuine Cuyp?" said Beauflower, rather sarcastically, for he was in a bad humour with himself and every one else just then; and he disliked the impudent insolence of the man, and the sort of sheriff-officer air with which his eyes wandered over the room, appraising article after article.

"Well, it may be a replica, and, no doubt, it is. I think, in fact, I saw something very like it at

Christie's, last week, only rather bolder in execution."

This was a hastily snatched-up lie, but Bassevi knew well where to go to for such weapons.

"This fellow fishing here to the left is not a bit in Cuyp's manner; he never—no; that's more in Both's style. Real Cuyps are very rare. And may I ask where you picked up this school of Cuyp? It's the older Cuyp, I'm nearly sure."

"It was bought by my father at the Beckford sale; it was put up the first day before the dealers came down; their train happened to be rather late. My father was offered £200 for it for the National Gallery."

"Then I'd have let 'em had it. Two hundred! why, half-a-dozen of 'em would not run to that."

Bassevi said this with an air of real scorn, not to be acquired by a novice in bargaining. He began to regret saying so much about the picture.

"S'elp me," he said, with more and more of the Jewish gabble about him as he got excited; "if I didn't, last October, see four Cuyps as good as this, and a Carlo Maratti thrown in, go for eighteen pun' and three crowns. Two hundred! well, that was a let in."

"It may be," said Beauflower, with icy coldness. "Well, and what do you say to the fellow picture?"

The other picture was smaller and less showy than its fellow, but even more deliciously tranquil and sunny. The foreground was a reach of sun-steeped water, golden as pale sherry, its liquid surface only broken by a long line of fishing-net corks ; beyond a boat or two with broad brown sails, turned to cloth of gold by the universal harmony of sunny colour that had soaked the faint long gold line of the walls of Dort into the same hue, and made all the air and even the soft fleeces of lingering sunset clouds golden mellow also.

Bassevi's machinery was in better order this time. He was all cold contempt ; he looked at the frame, then turned the picture, and tapped it ; it was painted on oak panel.

"Yes," said he, "pretty enough ; but not a real Cuyp. Evidently copy ; many people painted like him. My man could copy that so as you wouldn't know it. I'd change it, and I swear, you actually would not know it. I tell you what, there's not a man in the trade gives better prices than I do ; and I wouldn't give more than thirteen pounds for that picture ; and I don't think even then I should ever see my money again. I give you my word of that."

"What you would give is of little consequence to me," said Beauflower, rather sharply, for he

was disgusted with the wretch's manner. "The trade value of a picture is only interesting to the trade. We all regard that as a *chef d'œuvre*, and prefer it much to the other. To me it has an indescribable charm. I know little of art technicalities myself, but all our family are fond of art. Mr. Goodrick, too, who is a great judge, endorses our opinion in this matter. I suppose, as a professional man, you consider Mr. Goodrick a judge?"

"Oh, yes, he knows his way about, and he ought to, he's paid well for his experience. He's given money for jewels that I wouldn't (and I was brought up as a clerk at a diamond cutter's in Amsterdam)—that I wouldn't give that for" (and Bassevi snapped his dirty fingers till his coarsely-fine rings glistened again). "That's a fairish picture, but as for Cuyp, no, not for Joe, Oh no, no, no," and Bassevi grinned sardonically, and looked as cunning and insolent as a croupier at Baden-Baden when the Bank has been doing peculiarly well.

Bassevi had never sat down, indeed the Vicar had never asked him; he did not want to prolong the visit of the detestable "cad."

"This, perhaps, is worth your notice," said Beauflower, with ill-restrained contempt, and pointing to a very exquisitely-carved German portrait head of some great man of Charles the

Fifth's time, one of the seven Electors perhaps, or Ulrich von Hutten, or Franz of Sickingendorf. It was carved in lime wood, with almost Chinese care, the broad, square features were finely modelled, the beard and ruff, with every hair, every pleat given with almost pre-Raphaelite realism, and yet with fine artistic breadth.

Bassevi's eye gloated upon the gem, he could not this time conceal his longing.

"Ah!" said he, "now, that's something like, it's a copy I think, but it's d—— good, and no two words about it, and would fetch its price; might even run to 10*l.* if it was well fought for. I know a man would give 9*l.* for it down, and no auction expenses."

"These things have a value to me beyond all money," said the Vicar, proudly. "I have been accustomed to them ever since I could walk. All the little art I know I have learned from them. But I am afraid I really must hurry away, I have some letters to write to catch the three o'clock post, and our boy goes at two."

"Oh, no ceremony with me. I'm a plain man. I suppose there is no chance of a deal with you; but if you ever should want to swop these things for real slap-up west-end furniture, you've got my card; or if ever you should want a little ready money and have any old-fashioned family jewels

or curiosities, there is not a man in all London gives larger prices or deals more like a gentleman than I do."

Beauflower's blood boiled. Was it possible that this blood-sucker, too, had heard of his embarrassments? Should he push him at once out of the door? but no, the pettifogger, quite unconscious, was stooping down, whistling, to look at some old Chelsea china, and Pompadour Sèvres, on the bottom shelf of a chiffonier.

"I see you've got some Sèvres there," he said, as he rose, "*that* always fetches its price. Well, you won't forget, Mr. Beauflower, where I hang out, if ever you do want to part with anything. Perfect secrecy, you know. You'll excuse me mentioning it, but, you know, everyone wants ready money sometimes. I must be off to Fontford; that old Robinson is no more use than a child, unless he is told just what to do. I only wish I could paint, I'd show 'em. I know what people want. If you believe me, that old duffer spends half his time pottering about different sorts of mediums and imperishable colours. What does it matter, as I tell him, when the thing is once sold. Let it go, they'll want more; besides he will always put in too much finish for the money."

The Vicar, not in a mood to see any one, had stolen upstairs to his study, after telling Tony,

whom he met carrying up some clothes he had brushed to his master's room, to send George in half an hour for the post-bag, and betook himself to letters; first and foremost, one to the Oxford lawyer, then several to friends to solicit subscriptions for the Chetwynd Dilapidation Fund, and first and foremost to his old pupil Cantelupe, who was safe for 50*l.* at least.

There were laughing voices in the hall—they were those of Ethel, Julia, and Miss Chivers—then the front door slammed. They were gone. Thank goodness.

He had just finished his letters when his mother and sister came in, and sitting by the fire began an animated description of “the talking to” the servants had had, and their final surrender to Julia; and, lastly, of the intolerable conduct of Mr. Pitts, who had never even said “thank you,” for the money, but rattled off in his light cart as if he had done a rather meritorious action, and gained the money by consummate ingenuity. Beauflower, who had a keen sense of humour, was listening with much amusement to Julia's description of the servants' talk, which her mother regarded in a much severer way, when there came slow heavy, clumpy footsteps along the passage leading from the back stairs to

the study, which was in a line with some of the bed-rooms.

There was a rough hand at the door, it slowly opened, and the gaunt, bony form of George appeared on the threshold. He was pale, sodden, and morbidly melancholy. His red hair was rough and tumbled. He tried to speak twice, but only a wild hiccup came. At last his fishy and wandering eye alighted on the angry and surprised face of Mrs. Beaflower. That recalled him to the cause of the many antidotes to grief that he had taken. He pointed at her with an enormous beefy hand, red with cold and darkened with earth.

"Here we are," he stammered. "Three broken 'arts, here we be, three broken 'arts." (He was evidently past counting.)

"Oh, the horrid man's been drinking," flew out Mrs. Beaflower; "this time, Ned, dear, he really must go."

George smiled languidly, and repeated that three broken 'arts had now undoubtedly met, and there seemed to him deep consolation in the fact.

"Go down, sir, go down directly," cried the Vicar, hardly able to keep decently majestic, "or I can tell you there'll be one broken head. Go down, and don't come near the place again till you are told; to-morrow we'll have a talk."

George retreated, but still asserting that three broken 'arts had for once met and exchanged their sorrows. He was an excellent servant when he was not drunk : steady, silent, and faithful ; but when drunk he was always either consequential or maudlin.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DINNER PARTY AT THE ABBEY.

MRS. HARKER, a pushing woman if ever there was one, always intent on enlarging the social circle within which she conjured, was now entirely intent on securing the young lord (*in futuro*, at least) at any cost, however foolish, or vicious, or heartless he might be. Her grandson a lord! that seemed the very end of all possible happiness. That was the one thing that wealth could not buy. A coronet was not like fame, virtue, or such shadows, but a palpable fact, to be seen, and touched, and handled. Then, then she would tread under foot the few proud county families who still delayed (in a sort of hopeless protest against new money) inviting her and hers to their parties. She had planned a dinner that was, for a certain known cost, to secure so many steps forward.

Nor had her worthy husband been idle in his own dark mole-like way. The young spendthrift was

so involved in loans and mortgages, proffered—indeed, forced upon him by his only too zealous friend, that, bound hand and foot, the gull could scarcely stir without permission from the Abbey. He did not as yet feel the restraint, but the invisible wires of the cage were fast closing round him. Carefully, thought by thought, Harker had planned the way in which so to entangle and drive into a corner the thoughtless young prodigal as to compel him, without the compulsion being in any way visible, to marry his (Harker's) daughter. The worthy couple had, to facilitate this desirable measure, half resolved at once to get rid of Amy, but on second thought had decided that such a step might in some degree disclose their plans, and perhaps excite in the reckless young scapegrace a romantic interest for the girl, of which he had already betrayed some symptoms by his repeated inquiries for her since her accident in the hunting field. Moreover, Mrs. Harker, with a true womanly instinct, had presumed that no one but a lover (*in posse* or *in esse*) could have shown such eager and chivalrous devotion as Beauflower had ; and knowing something of the human heart, she conjectured, not unwisely, that if there had been no love before, some would probably have arisen since a rescue so timely and so daring. She looked

forward, therefore, with keen expectation to this dinner to detect this love, and, if possible, to render it conspicuous to every one, and especially to her future son-in-law.

Dressing for a grand dinner you don't want to go to, but must, although you would enjoy dining at home ten times as much, being not in the mood for strangers, or talking, or elaborate meals, a dinner where there will be too much for every one, and yet not enough for any one, is a ghastly ordeal, and produces in ill-organised minds a maniacal wish to break away at all risks; nor does a cold December evening render the corporeal mortification less, especially when you are not a pushing person, and are going rather to oblige the host than yourself. The task, however, completed (the cold linen, chilly as a shroud, put on), a reaction of self-approval ensues, and the unfortunate victim, who finds life, as Sir Cornewall Lewis said with pleasant cynicism, tolerably bearable but for its pleasures, effects a Curtius plunge of it, and prepares to make the best of himself.

If any of our readers have ever been in love (as is by no means improbable), they will imagine Beauflower's feelings as he walked through the park with his rather moody companion that gloomy damp December evening. Mr. Goodrick

had never been to the Abbey since that morning the mutilated family pictures of the Stauntons were shown him, to his infinite disgust, and the thought of that day seemed to have awoke in him many bitter feelings. He had indeed told his friend the Vicar openly that he should not have accepted the invitation but for him. He hated the Harkers, he boldly confessed, all that belonged to them, and all who liked them. He did not hold out either any very great promise of being peculiarly pleasant or conciliating. The Vicar had never been so particular in his dress before : after many failures he had accomplished the most carelessly graceful white tie ; his clothes fitted his fine stalwart frame to perfection—he looked the very picture of an English gentleman, subdued and restrained, but not to any mincing effeminacy, by a grave and responsible profession, while Talleyrand himself could not have looked more reserved or more imperturbably negative than Mr. Goodrick.

“Will *she* be at dinner?” thought the lover, as the great house, illuminated at every window, rose before them at a turning of the road. “How I long and yet how I dread to see her!”

No schoolboy, going to the half-year’s examination, ever felt more nervous, or yet more proudly anxious to conceal his nervousness. He felt that

the Harkers would suspect the anxiety with which they could not but be acquainted, and would observe at once that his eyes, on entering the room, were seeking for Amy. Then, like a brave frank fellow, he cast off these fears as a young oak tree shakes off the rain-drops. He would keep the *volto sciolto* and the *pensieri stretti* that the Elizabethan sage advised, and no one should guess the workings of his heart. He would turn his mind—till he had an opportunity of talking to Amy—to his friend, and watch the aspect he would assume, as a man of the world, among people he disliked.

The people in the drawing-room were not very interesting. There was Horace Bodger, R.A., a sardonic, bilious man, a painter of conventional battle scenes, who lived on his replicas, chiefly painted by old Robinson and other unknown drudges; and there was Dominic Ergot, R.A., a painter of High Church subjects, who affected to talk broken English, and used still more broken French; and there was Mr. Oscar Wildair, a young novelist, who imagined he was seeing fashionable life, and was generously resolving to reproduce his host and every one he met in his next highly coloured work (there was no Arab veneration for the salt about this daring young writer); and Dr. Bumpus, a philosophical writer,

who was so tedious in his theories for making a short north-west passage to knowledge in some way by use of the auxiliary verbs, that one would have almost thought him a writer for the ——; and there was Lord Mazagan (and therefore, of course, not his lady), gallant as ever, and very polite in his inquiries for Amy; there were several county gentlemen and their wives; and there was a shy young pink-and-white lady, a friend of Miss Harker's, whose face, moving inharmoniously with her body, gave her somewhat the appearance of a waxwork figure with moveable eyes. Cantelupe and his inseparable friend and sponge, Jack Talbot, were there, too, as great in small talk, and quite as much bored, as usual.

Amy did not make her appearance at dinner. To all inquiries for her, Mrs. Harker gave cold, curt, and rather repelling answers. She believed Ethel's governess was not quite well enough to bear the fatigue of sitting all through dinner, but she had no doubt she would come down for a short time to the drawing-room. She really hoped what had happened would cure the silly girl of making further displays of horsemanship. With Carry, now, the matter would have been different, as Carry was a perfect horsewoman.

"Is she not, Mr. Cantelupe?" said an old maid toady.

“Oh yes; rides awfully well, I’m sure,” said the young gentleman appealed to; “but that mare isn’t ridden enough to be safe.”

The conversation at dinner was stiff and guarded, in spite of a momentary effervescence and babbling thaw when the champagne began to come round, but which relapsed again because the new and old money somehow could not amalgamate. Every one was watching the other, being afraid he should make unbecoming concessions or advances that might be mistaken. There were only two or three exceptions, and one was Jack Talbot, who, on the look out for an heiress, flirted desperately with Miss Harker, in case Cantelupe should after all, as he half expected, throw her over for Amy, and to this flirtation Miss Harker warmly responded, hoping to arouse the jealousy of her very frigid lover. Beauflower, too, determined to make himself quietly agreeable, had tackled Mrs. Bodger on the subject of Rome, which was her favourite theme, she having once spent a week there with Bodger; while Mrs. Harker, wishing to keep the party alive by affected conviviality and sham enthusiasm for art and nature, talked incessantly and laughed as much as she dared with Lord Mazagan and Dr. Bumpus, the former being gallant in a light, and the latter in a clumsy and ponderous manner. The

other county people talked the usual empty county talk about Tuesday's ball, and yesterday's hunting, and Beaver of the 26th, and the game killed at the last battue at Swallowcliff, and so on.

At Mr. Goodrick's end of the table, just as the serious part of the pompous and interminable dinner (according to the gilt bills of fare) was over, the conversation fell on the adulteration of food, especially in London, and the universal corruption of tradesmen's morality.

"I am really told," said a prim, rather shy young curate, from Birdbrook, "I am really told that half the butter eaten in London is only lard."

The young curate, fresh from Oxford, had heard that Lord Mazagan had one or two livings in his gift, and was anxious to shine in the conversation. Hitherto he had been flagrantly flirting with a little girl in pink—who had eyes, and knew it—next him, and suddenly conscious that he was watched by Mrs. Harker's vulture orbs, turned very red and plunged into talk.

Mr. Goodrick, whose indignation and contempt at the fussy display of the dinner had long been boiling up, swooped down at once on his young victim.

"Sir," he said, his rough grey eyebrows arching with Johnsonian grandeur, "you know little of London : sir, there is nothing unadulterated there

but eggs and water, and the eggs are generally stale and the water is impure."

The curate grew very hot, and hiding himself behind an epergne, sipped his wine, and made a confused and inaudible remark to the angel in pink, who, to his infinite confusion, looked mischievously amused. Seeing Mr. Goodrick was a character, Mr. Bodger, who was taking in all the food he could, and who, indeed, was not nearly such a fool as he looked, though a wretched artist, and a "shamster" and pretender altogether, being a sharp business man, with very fair common sense, made a suggestive remark about the great increase of demand in London for small luxuries, which Bodger was pleased to regard as a proof of growing civilisation, in which absurd opinion Mr. Harker loudly agreed.

Beauflower quietly asserted his dissent from this proposition.

"I am sorry to entirely differ from the first two gentlemen," said Mr. Goodrick. "I have spent the greater part of my life in the West Indies, and since then have visited nearly every capital of Europe. When I returned to London I was astonished by the increase of small inventions that crowd English shop windows. Snippers to cut the wire of soda-water bottles, things to test

milk, boxes for stamps, brushes to wet stamps, boxes to hold the brushes that wet stamps, cases to contain the boxes that hold the brushes that wet the stamps—every sort of fanciful rubbish to create new wants. Sir, if you want to learn all that a sensible man can do without, walk down the Strand or Regent Street—what the wise man does is to lessen his wants, and reduce the friction of life.”

Bodger having no answer ready sufficiently crushing to this discharge of grape shot, and Mr. Harker disliking the somewhat oracular tone of his visitor, the conversation again turned to the last run. Mrs. Harker had ingeniously shifted the organ to this new stop by a single question to Cantelupe as to whether he had been out since the day of Miss Robinson’s accident. She felt this would bring forward the young future peer, and some of the taciturn sporting men, who began to look unmistakably bored and were ungallantly longing for the ladies to retire. A pack of four or five men instantly gave tongue all at once, as if they had been set going by electricity. Cantelupe led off with the find in East Dean Wood, and kept up the running very spiritedly through Coney Coppice and the Marlows back to Forest Westgate, over the plough to Nightingale Bottom, Cobdens and Drought up to Pine Pit Hanger, where Jack Talbot got an awful spill, and Cantelupe blew his first horse.

The violent cough of old Colonel Harcourt, of Dinton, here producing a slight lull, Lord Mazagan took up the running with his usual gay alertness, pushed on through West Dean Wood to the corner of Cellars Down, crossed Hacking Place and Herring Dean at a fearful pace, and leaped Warrington Brook (where four went in). A remark about the cropper that that mad fellow young Brown got between Hindon Down and Madehurst Parsonage, however, enabled Cantelupe to slip in again.

Off he went, disdaining all inquiries. Away to Haughton, then back by Knoyle to Ofham Hill, where, thank goodness, partly owing to the wine passing round for the first time, and it being necessary to help the ladies, twenty-three hounds ran into their fox at 20 to 4, after a one hour and fifty minutes' glorious run.

"God bless the young fellow," whispered Mr. Goodrick to Mr. Ergot, who sat next him. "I thought he never would kill that fox."

"Oui, oui. He vos très fatigant," said the gentleman with the Don Quixote face, who affected French English; "it was terribly ennuyeux zat fox."

"There is no doubt in the world," said Bodger, replying very loud to some very small remark on modern art by the young curate, who had rallied

after his third glass of champagne, and when he found he was not so much observed as he at first thought ; “and it is my sincere opinion that our English school of art is to rank high in the future. We have got over our Pre-Raphaelite extravagancies (the young coxcombs soon found their absurd finish didn’t pay), and we are every day struggling towards a larger, grander, and I may say, more historic style ; but we still greatly want recognition. Even the public hall of every country town some day will have its historic deed and religious aspirations.”

“Très bien dit—ver well,” said Mr. Ergot, clapping his hands, “bis, bis.”

“Religious haspirations, delineated for warning and for incitement.”

“Brava, brava, vary well put.”

“How very eloquent,” said Mrs. Harker, sweetly smiling, and showing her gold tooth confidentially to Lord Mazagan.

“It may be so,” said Mr. Goodrick, as ready with his wet blanket, as a Retiarius with his fatal net ; “it may be so, and I dare say it is, but upon my life I walk round the exhibitions, and I see nothing but dull imitations of Leys, and Gèrome, and that fellow who paints Greek girls and Cupids. I find little timid bits of copied landscape painted in a small affected manner, pretty

sham faces, and great slip-slop portraits staring and vulgar. I find no powerful true drawing, little vigour, no command of brush ; in fact, mere little neat boudoir and drawing-room pictures painted to order. What do the crowds gape at most ? why, a white satin gown painted by a fifth-rate Terburg ; a trunk of a tree (took half a year) not a quarter so good as Tintoret used to do in three strokes ; stiff pretty groups at a railway station, borrowed from photographs ; dead salmon, every scale copied. Bah ! where are Hogarth and Velasquez ? ”

“ I am afraid,” said Mrs. Harker (who could have stifled the cynic in his own wet blanket), in her most cutting way, and she prided herself on using a very keen knife ; “ I am afraid there is very little anywhere that you do like. I pity the poor artists if critics are all like you.”

“ I pity their want of brains, madam—but you are quite right, there is very little I do like. I don’t like dramatists who steal from the French without acknowledgment. I don’t like poets who steal from one another. I don’t like artists who sell replicas as their own work, and starve and bully their drudges.”

“ But, on my parole, artists are men of honour,” said Ergot, angrily, for he never had had an order for a replica in his life. “ They paint replicas with

zeir own main,—ah ! pardonnez moi, I forget my English,—with their own proper hand, the assistant does merely the dead colour.”

“It may be so,” said Mr. Goodrick, “but there is a poor artist, a Mr. Robinson, down here now, decorating for Mr. Harker, who, to my knowledge, for he told me so yesterday, has painted the entire of one R.A.’s replicas for several years.

“Quelle honte, what shame is that ?” said Ergot.

Bodger said nothing, but turning a deep yellow red, helped himself to almonds and raisins.

“Allow me to help you to some more wine ?” said Lord Mazagan to Mrs. Harker.

“No, thank you, my Lord, no more.” Mrs. Harker gave the usual conventionally unmeaning look and smile to the nearest ladies, and they gathered themselves up. Beauflower opened the door. Then the ladies all swept out with parting smiles (those at least who had been flirting), and everybody seeming much relieved, began to get lively, and to pass the wine and make forays on the dessert in the English manner.

Conversation fell very much on Cantelupe’s pet Immenschikoff, which had “run a great horse” recently at Chantilly, but had eventually come in fourth, owing to some error, as it appeared,

of Wells's, who had not pressed him enough the last hundred yards. However, it was pleasant to hear Mr. Harker's opinion that he was safe for the Two Thousand, and that only one horse of Sir Joseph Hawley's was in better form for the Derby. The great question among the Wiltshire backers present seemed to be whether he could be steered round the corner safely or stay over the Epsom rise of the last half mile. He had only stood a good thirteenth at Newmarket, but then every one allowed his fine speed across the flat, and all round Slobury to the east was level as your hand.

"Better throw the money down a sink," said Mr. Goodrick to Mr. Ergot. Bodger had gone round near the fire, for he had had great difficulty in not flying at the Retiarius with a dessert knife. He began to think now that he remembered having seen Goodrick at some of Christie's sales, and he longed to poison him. He, Horace Bodger, R.A., who had painted Prince Albert in three different costumes, to be sneered at as an impostor!—him—fight him?—no—duels were gone out.

Ergot pretending not to hear, began peeling an orange in an absorbed manner, for he saw Bodger was in a deuce of a state, and camaraderie always made him austere to art critics on principle. He had long toaded them unsucces-

fully, and artists, like woman, have the "*spretæ injuria formæ*." Mr. Harker was also silently furious, because Bodger was a man of consequence, and had been a lion ever since he painted "The opening of the Thames Tunnel," a very Rembrandtic picture that was engraved, yet was not so appreciated perhaps as it deserved.

"Any more wine, my Lord? more wine, Cantelupe? come, take a glass of whitewash." (Why should this always be said as if it was clever?) "No? no? well, then, suppose we join the ladies."

Now was Bodger's time. It was expected of him.

"I think, Harker, I must remind you of a promise," he said, oratorically (he was a toady of the deepest dye, and Harker had already ordered a replica of "The Battle of the Boyne"), "the promise of showing us your wonderful collection of the Dutch school, before we have the pleasure of joining the ladies."

"Brava, brava," said Mr. Ergot, clapping his hands affectedly.

Everybody mumbled something. "Bother!" groaned several of the sporting men, who had secretly sworn to Cantelupe, if possible, to stop behind, and race two filbert maggots for 50*l.* a side.

Mr. Harker seemed quite surprised, and yet pleased.

"I shall have the truest pleasure, my Lord," he said, quite ignoring poor Bodger, who had led up to him so well. "It is a poor collection, but there are just one or two good things. A curious Holbein, believed to be unique ; a fine Bellini and some very wonderful Vanderheydens, if you like finish. The fact is, the grand ideal school is all very well, but I generally find people like a highly finished Gerard Dow or Denner, better than anything else, after all. I've ordered a fire in the gallery in case anyone cared to see them."

"Denner !" croaked Mr. Goodrick.

"Trop dur," whispered Ergot ; "no good, but these rich people will have their parafes. Oh ! peste, I'm talking French again."

"Intolerable coxcomb !" thought the old virtuoso. "Now, then, for the fellow's pictures."

Mr. Harker threw open a pair of folding doors, and led the way into the gallery, a long and very handsome room, the ceiling of which old Robinson was going to decorate with a pasticcio from Paul Veronese.

The collection described with such repulsive humility was really a very good one of its limited kind. There were some fine portraits by Honthorst, a charming ice scene by Berchem, two or

three breezy Backhuysens, a fair Cuyp or two, some great boar hunts by Snyders, a spirited cock-fight by Hondekoeter, a very good breakfast scene by Metz, a reasonably good Teniers, and a vulgar Jan Steen.

Every one was delighted with a finely finished view in Rotterdam, by Vanderheyden. Bodger here stopped and delivered a short harangue, it being necessary to reassert himself.

"Just observe this, my Lord," he said, always singling out the unfortunate nobleman, who had not had nearly his usual allowance of port, and was cursing the whole affair to himself in a subterranean way, "excuse my directing your attention to the extraordinary breadth and finish of this incomparable picture; look, you can see every brick and the lines of mortar, yet it is all bathed in a beautiful harmonious atmosphere."

"Partly the result of age," said Mr. Goodrick.

Bodger could but ride over the interruption. "The water in the canal, too, clear as crystal."

"Brown crystal!"

"The figures are perfect. The artist on the quay, you see, is painting."

"Bai Jawv!" said Talbot, putting by his eyeglass, "and so he is. I'll go and see where Canteleupe's got to." He was already off to the filbert race, and Talbot was afraid of being too late, for he

had money on, having indeed, just borrowed it of Cantelupe on purpose.

"Here's a fine thing, too," said Bodger to his audience, "a genuine Holbein, portrait of Cromwell, the fellow, you know, who pulled down everything." Bodger was rather afraid of further historical description, as he did not know whether this was or was not the grim Oliver. "How that flat cap's painted, and that clove pink he holds;—flat green background, you see, as usual."

Mr. Goodrick lifted the painting and tapped the back. It was wood. "This is no Holbein," he said; "stuff! this is painted on mahogany. Raleigh brought the first mahogany over, and it was not common in England till Queen Anne's time. This is only a very fair copy."

Bodger was livid with rage, but he had no reply. He merely said, "Very likely transferred to mahogany. We have no time here to discuss these hypercriticisms. Nobody but this gentleman could doubt its being a Holbein, and a very fine Holbein, too. Bellini," said Bodger, angrily, stopping before a large, hard, dry, reddish-brown picture of the Adoration of the Magi, in the early Venetian manner.

"Don't care much for that," said Lord Maza-gan, waxing mutinous as the oracle proved fallible,

and devoting himself to some rosy nymphs by Poelemburg.

"It's a remarkable picture," said Bodger, "very remarkable and of enormous value."

"It is. It was painted," said the impostor's tormentor, "by Bartolommeo Veneziano; all his pictures but three, poor man, are attributed to Bellini. I know his work by the invariable composition, and by the drawing of the child's head."

"I think you're wrong," said Bodger, timidly, but he would not fight. Lord Mazagan, who was quick enough, now lost all faith in the blind leader of the blind.

"All I can say is," said Mr. Harker, "Bellini or no Bellini, I bought it of the best judge in Paris, and that is M. Chassepot, for three thousand francs. It came from the Foscari palace."

"Oh, no one can doubt it is a Bellini," said Bodger, rudely, for he had quite lost his temper. "Now, here is a picture by Karl du Jardin; 'the Diamond' it is called in the trade. It was in the Fonthill gallery; a gem, indeed. Beckford bought it at the Duke de Choiseul's sale."

Well, it was a gem. Bodger was right for once. Broken foreground—a piece of water—cows and cowherd—buildings in middle distance—rocky hills further off to the right—the touch pure and delicate—the blue sky clear as a royal sapphire—

the light clouds beautifully put in—over all a perfect harmony, unity, and breadth.

To Bodger's disgust, and Beauflower's infinite amusement, Lord Mazagan, before compromising himself at all, looked at Mr. Goodrick, who smiled approval.

"Yes," said the obdurate connoisseur, coldly, "that will do. Better than his master, Berchem, but still far too smooth and tame. I'd rather myself have one of Wilson's landscapes, or a Turner water colour;—matter of taste. Yes, it's a fine thing, that. First-class picture."

"I thought," said Harker, with subdued malice, "that not one picture of mine was going to meet your royal approbation. Do you like good Watteaus?"

"Yes; oh, yes; flimsy, but very charming. A model for all drop scenes for ever. Where are they? Oh, these are them."

The Watteaus were four large pictures—Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter. The summer—masquerading lovers under bluish trees, close to a fountain. Winter, a girl gracefully turning round as she sat by the fire to throw a ball of thread to a kitten that was lying on its back and playing with it.

"There," said Mr. Harker, relieving guard with Bodger.

"Very pretty, indeed," said Mr. Goodrick,

“but I suppose I must not give my real opinion, for those were Beckford pictures, I know; he bought them of the Marquis of Hertford.”

“Oh, yes, pray do; say your worst. These are generally considered to be the finest Watteaus existing. I had two people from Paris to see them only last week. Well, what is the matter?”

“They’re very pretty, but the fact is they’re not Watteaus at all; they’re Lancret’s. I have indeed engravings of them that I bought at Vienna.”

“You may have, my dear sir, but that proves nothing. Many of Watteau’s pictures were engraved, were they not?”

“But my engravings bear Lancret’s name, and have the contemporaneous date. Call them Watteaus; but after all, a good Lancret is better, any day, than a bad Watteau.”

Mr. Harker was too angry to answer, so he only waved his hand, and said,

“Gentlemen, I think that’s nearly all I have to show you, and now we’ll join the ladies.”

On their way the procession was enriched by Cantelupe, Jack Talbot, and the rest who had been sitting apart, but not, like Milton’s angels, to talk of predestination and such high matters. Cantelupe looked pleased, for he had lost two hundred pounds, and Talbot, who had won, looked rather sorry because he had not run the

last maggot for double or quits. As the seceders had artfully slipped back to the gallery door, and were found poring over a second-rate Reubens, their secret was not discovered.

"Ah! Fitz," said Lord Mazagan, yawning with pleasure, "you should have gone round the whole of 'em with us."

"They are very fine indeed," said the worthy nephew.

"By the bye, Harker," said Lord Mazagan, "have you such a thing about the place as an air-gun. I've got a little rascal of a nephew from Eton, come to spend the Christmas with me, and he's mad to try an air-gun at the rooks. It shall be sent back all right. My young gentleman will tire of it in two days."

"I think I've got one somewhere about," said Mr. Harker. "My poor boy, Ned, that died at Rugby, was a very clever shot with one. It used to be in one of the cupboards of my study, and if it is there still, I'll send a man over with it to-morrow."

Lord Mazagan expressed his thanks; "the boy would be delighted."

"By the bye, Beauflower," said Mr. Harker, having now Cantelupe and Beauflower next to him as they moved across the hall to the drawing room, "you will find Miss Robinson, I believe, in

the drawing-room, she is naturally very anxious, Ethel tells me, to thank her preserver."

This home-thrust was very well meant, but it fell short of a perfectly successful lunge, as at that moment Cantelupe had slipped his arm into Beauflower's and drawn him aside.

"I say, old fellow," he began, "I want to ask you to do me a favour."

"Well, that's a respectful way to speak to your old tutor."

"Well, you are a good old fellow. But come, no chaff, I really want to ask you to draw up my address for the county papers. I want you to pull me through. I don't know any more about it than the man in the moon. I'm a regular duffer at writing. I want you to put me in training as a Liberal-Conservative."

"Oh, the hybrid."

"Yes, that's the line my agent tells me I must take. Cautious extension of suffrage—vote by ballot un-English—gradual retrenchments—no democratic innovations, and all that sort of thing."

"Well, it's not much in my way, but I suppose I must not refuse you. Can you come the day after to-morrow? When's the nomination day at Slobury?"

"Friday week. Oh, yes; I'll come, like a bird. Mind, I really am coming."

They threw open the drawing-room door and entered into the brilliantly lit noisy room where the coffee was now permeating. Beauflower would rather have ridden at a battery of cannon. He felt his heart beat faster as his eye glanced around the room looking for the one face that haunted him. Lord Mazagan and the young curate and Bulger and Dr. Bumpus, and one or two others, were in such a knot at the door talking to Mr. Harker, who was laughing and lively in a forced and rather overdone way, that there was no getting past them for a moment or two, till the footmen charged down upon them with the coffee. Cantelupe and old Colonel Harcourt and Ergot were yardarm and yardarm with Mrs. and Miss Harker, while Jack Talbot was addressing himself to the young lady in pink, much to the vexation of the curate, who was pretending to be absorbed in Doré's Dante; a tall insipid girl in white was moaning some inaudible song at the piano, watched in silent agony by the rising novelist, who had been told off for this purpose, and who, wanting to get near a lively girl in blue, and moreover having to turn the music, and not knowing the least when to turn, was in a purgatory from which, however, no prayers could extricate him for the next awful five minutes.

"Hush!" said a stout old gentleman, father of

the tall girl in white, sternly, but no one attended to him, singing being an excellent cover for conversation.

Beauflower's heart sank within him. Amy was not there, after all. What interest had the party for him now? Unconsciously to himself he had been dwelling on a sight of Amy as the golden crown of the evening. Mrs. Harker looked at him and smiled, as if she divined his thoughts; she said something in a low tone to Colonel Harcourt, then her coterie put their heads together, and looked towards where he stood alone. By the window in front of Mr. Harker's chattering party there was a large, round, yellow and crimson silk settee, with a high luxuriant cushioned back, against which, and facing him, leaned Jack Talbot and the pretty girl in pink.

The interminable song ending with a ghastly dangerous shake on the word "never," everybody seemed relieved and grew almost grateful with their thoroughly sincere "thank you's." At that very moment Ethel, tossing her golden mane like a little fairy queen run wild, darted forward from behind somewhere or other, shook hands with the Vicar, and led him to the other side of the room. There, with her back to the settee, which had hidden her, pale, but gentle, calm as ever, and even more beautiful from

the saintly pallor that had not yet left her cheek, leaned Amy. She was charmingly dressed in pale blue silk, trimmed round the neck with swan's down.

"Amy," said Ethel, "I've brought a stranger to introduce to you."

A slight colour, pale as that which dyes the winter rose, came upon Amy's cheek, and her soft brown eyes brightened as she put out her little white hand, which the Vicar eagerly pressed as he asked after her health with that low tender cooing tone that only love can give the human voice.

"Oh, how much I have to thank you for, Mr. Beauflower!" she said, at first a little shyly. "How brave of you to risk your life for me!"

"It was so brave of him, wasn't it?" said Ethel; "everyone says so, Amy."

"You must never mention it again," said Beauflower. "There was not a man in the field that would not have done exactly as I did."

"That does not make me less grateful. I don't think I shall be afraid of a horse even now when I get stronger, but Dr. Briscoe won't let me venture out for a day or two. Oh, I do so long to get out. I've promised an old school-fellow of mine a drawing of the old Manor House. Can you tell me the date of it? Is it as early as Shakspeare? Miss Harker thinks it is. I don't think it is."

“Take my seat, Mr. Beauflower,” said Ethel, getting up from Amy’s side.

The future woman at Ethel’s age has a Robin Goodfellow sort of malicious pleasure in egging on people to fall in love with each other. Beauflower launched into architecture and the poetry of it, and into Ruskinian theories and fantasies, in which Amy and the lively girl in blue became profoundly interested, and got very soon into a pleasant, laughing, chatty coterie, in which each one had his own share, for the Vicar, though an eloquent talker, did not special plead, or practise public speeches at you, or preach, but had mercy, and let others have their say, being charmed with Amy’s fresh, quick sense, and the fire-fly flash of her womanly intelligence.

Do any of our readers know (it is quite possible some of them may) the paradise of sitting near the woman for whom your love is just dawning—that happy, primrose time, so pure and so divine, when every instant the delicious delusion opens more and more into bloom, and the tender shoots and young leaves spread and widen as fast as a wild rose in a warm June night? What quiet rapture to feel the soft folds of her dress press against you, to see nearer and more enjoyably the pure jewel colour of her eyes, to be conscious of a breath like the breeze from

violet banks, to be able to well mark the coral of her lips, the pearl of her teeth, the golden silk of the softer and lighter hair that grows round her temples, where the veins flow so blue under the pale rose-leaf of the skin ! Headlong down love's precipice the first soft glance of gratitude had hurled our helpless hero, and there he lay at the bottom bound hand and foot, with a flock of fluttering Cupids hovering deridingly round this last victim of the syrens. In vain Miss Harker came in her arch, youthful, tripping way, smoothing the extreme bandolined edge of her sable hair with one lean finger, as if it was an actress's wig, and she was afraid it was coming off. Odious struggler for matrimony ! She had long since forgotten how to be natural. It was difficult to say whether the insolent and purse-proud father, the pushing mother, or the affected daughter making such flagrant love to the young spendthrift, was the most detestable. Like some treacherous sea, "Carry" was almost most dangerous when apparently most tranquil. There was no knowing what bourasque, tourmente, or white squall the clear surface of those cat-like greenish-grey eyes concealed. With the delightful vivacity of an old "romp" at a fancy ball, she came tripping up to the little group recently recruited by Cantelupe, who had been admitted, under protest from Ethel,

to the charmed circle. It was that that had made her specially viperish, and the more so because he had left her side to go, just as she thought she had secured him to turn over her music for that “chaaaaaarming sweet song,” “I arise from Dreams of Thee,” which she had moreover intended to bring directly home to him by a side glance shot straight into his nearest eye. A look of indignation and reproach from Mrs. Harker, such as old sportsmen cast at the “muff” who misses his partridge with both barrels, had stung her to fury, hard to be restrained.

“Pardon my interrupting this pleasant *little* talk,” she said, in the honeyest tones; “but my dear Amy (she always called her Miss Robinson in private), I really must not allow you to over-exert yourself. You know, dear, what I promised Dr. Briscoe. I was to be your guardian. Now you must go to bed *at once*—mamma wishes it; and you must go now with Ethel; it is time for her, too. She is getting quite dissipated.”

Lovers are sad cowards. Beauflower did not dare to protest.

“Oh, not just yet, Carry,” cried Ethel, in the prettiest despair.

Oh, how early coquetting begins! She knew her small despair was pretty.

Just then Lord Mazagan came up in his delight-

ful vivacious way to say that he really must give the casting vote for Miss Harker. Miss Robinson looked dark under the eyes ; she was tired, he was sure, and he really must assume Dr. Briscoe's place, and punish himself by ordering her to bed.

It was in vain to struggle. Amy rose, and offered her hand to Beauflower. Just one look—or was it a look ? just one soft pressure—was it a pressure ? or was it only that the Vicar thought of the look as he shook hands with her, and thought of the hand as he shook it ? More shaking of hands. The black curtain began to descend ; she passed through the great gilt doorway of the temple of mammon—the curtain fell—she was gone.

It was some half-hour afterwards that Beauflower and Mr. Goodrick stood in a little ante-room opening on the hall, handing in the tickets (for everything at the Abbey was done by the sharpest machinery), for their greatcoats, goloshes, and umbrellas. Three or four shillings and a half-crown were carelessly strewed as decoy ducks upon the footman's desk.

“What a splendid active fellow that head keeper of Harker's is, Harcourt,” said a thick, port-winy voice in the chattering crowd pushing immediately behind the Vicar.

“A good servant,” answered a still huskier voice, “but doosedly impudent. I think it's as

much as ever Harker can do to keep him in his place. I wouldn't stand his sauce a week for all the pheasants in Wiltshire. Try one of these cigars ; they're from Rodrigo's in Piccadilly."

Then Cantelupe's loud, hearty voice broke the thread of the two old fogies' talk.

"Charming girl," he said ; "awfully stunning girl when she's in better form. Talk of style—why, she's twice the style of——"

"Fancy a parson riding like that," said another voice.

It was Amy they talked of, and Beauflower felt a pang of jealousy shoot through his heart when he thought of his own poverty, of the carrion crows that beset him, and of the wealth and title of his possible rival ; the next moment he passed out of the light into the dark.

CHAPTER X.

GOING HOME FROM THE PARTY.

THE Vicar went first between the dark shrubberies carrying his lantern, that shed as feeble a glimmer as that which the two million commentators have cast upon Shakspeare's text. The lantern shed a sickly yellow light on a foot or two of the sodden orange gravel, and, when it moved, rays of alternate dim light and darkness on the glossy green leaves of the laurels and aucubas. After a turning or two the noise of crunching wheels, the clamorous cries of "Lord Mazagan's carriage stops the way," "Colonel Harcourt's carriage," and other similar war shouts died away, and the calm soft tranquil darkness of a December night received them into its folds.

"If I had known it would be as black as this," said Mr. Goodrick, uncertain of the right turning, "I should certainly have had Tony with another lantern."

“We’re in the direct road now ; but we might as well have had two lanterns.”

Then the two friends relapsed again into silence, each floating down the current of his own thoughts. Beauflower was the first to break it.

“What cruel snubs you gave Bodger, Goodrick,” he said, as he plodded on sturdily with the lantern.

“Yes ; I wanted to, the toadying impostor ! I gave him several heavy falls, and Harker dared not come to his rescue. I had my scalping knife ready for him if he had—a man like that does not want the truth, he wishes to be deceived and to deceive.”

“Did you notice how they drove poor Miss Robinson to bed to keep her out of Cantelupe’s way ?”

“Of course I did—I see everything ! What a Tisiphone that woman is. I should like to make a workhouse nurse of her ; she has no more tenderness than a grindstone. I don’t know how it is, but that dear girl wins me more and more. She reminds me of a wife I lost many years ago, even before Staunton knew me. Ha ! she was a woman you were compelled to love ; and I love that girl because she reminds me of her. The vision came upon me to-night, as she turned

to look at us from the door, with a painful vividness ; but she is far less beautiful ! Look up at the stars, Beaflower, they seem trembling with ecstasy of joy at the glory and majesty of night ; do you think that the blest are there watching us from their diamond battlements ? Can they see our miserable struggles still ? Have they sympathy with our insect hopes and our vermin fears ? Can they hear our prayers and our groans ? Shall we join them there ? Why is inspiration so mute about these cravings of our souls ? ”

Mr. Goodrick spoke with a voice tremulous with excitement. His soul was soaring to those stars seeking everywhere for its lost companion. Beaflower answered,—

“ Probably the beings in those stars care no more for us than the stars do for those owls that we hear now hooting at them from the fir-woods.”

“ Ah ! young man, you have never loved,” said Mr. Goodrick, with a sigh that came from a heart riven by an undying sorrow ; “ it would come like balm to a wound that can never close if I only knew that she was there, and that she knew that I still loved her ! But there, you will think me an old fool, who has taken too much wine, if I open my heart to you like this. It is the star’s fault—a ray from one just as I first spoke seemed

to shoot straight to me as if bearing some heavenly message. Perhaps she sent it to guide me to her, and to warn me that we should soon meet. —Ugh! how damp the air is; I wish I had brought that favourite red silk handkerchief of mine. Tony ought to have reminded me. Beauflower, you won't laugh at the old cynic breaking down like this; but I have never got over the loss of my young wife—no love can ever replace that—and I've hated two-thirds of the world ever since. I believe I only stop down here for your sake and to get glimpses of Amy, and above all to hate those detestable Harkers. Anger acts like a tonic on my nerves."

"I wish Julia had been asked to-night," said the Vicar; "but I know they always think she puts Miss Harker rather in the shade. Ju's spirits are natural, and paste and diamonds never did go well together."

"Ah! your sister is the girl—she'd have soon rescued Amy from those old and young vultures—torn her clean away from their claws. By the bye, Beauflower, I've got something to tell you; I hadn't the courage before, because I knew you would be angry, but I really cannot intrude further on your hospitality. I am a cross old fellow, a great nuisance, and better alone; and so is Tony, for he is idle and he makes other people idle, so

I went yesterday and took some nice rooms at the veterinary surgeon's opposite the Harker Arms at Fontford. There I am still close to you ; and I can run over and have a chat with old Robinson, as he works, any day. You need not be afraid of Amy—I won't cut you out. I allow she's very nice, but I don't think she cares for me, and there are several objections to my ever marrying."

"Nonsense—stuff ! Well, I must say, your leaving us is rather a reproach to our hospitality."

Beauflower turned the conversation adroitly.

"By the bye, did you see me pin Harker in the corner by the fire-place ? Can you guess what we were talking about ?"

"Guess—pooh ! I know. About the Chetwynd dilapidations, to be sure !"

"And what success did I have ?"

"Success ! the success I expected—none. How can a stone yield anything but dust ?"

"Oh ! you far-seeing Odysseus, you are right" (Beauflower's voice quickened and deepened as he spoke), "that man is iron. I told him the whole case—told it with all the force and pathos I could throw into the story in such a place, represented the cruelty of the tax, the injustice of the sum to be extorted from the poor widow and innocent children ; whether just or not, the ter-

rible suffering and degradation in store for them if their friends did not interpose. He was cold as an iceberg. He said he made it a matter of principle not to encourage the improvidence of any class of persons, that Mr. Chetwynd had written at him in the county papers, and abused him for not improving the condition of the labouring classes; in fact, after various sophistries and windings, he flatly refused to give one shilling."

"The brute!" gasped Goodrick.

"He then began to tell me complacently, although I was so disgusted I had hardly patience to listen, that he was going to press the case hard against young Brown; he said he was the pest of the place, and encouraged all the poachers directly and indirectly. It was pretty nearly proved, he said, that he was with the men that night in Bagley Wood, although he could not be recognised, as the fellows all wore bits of crape over their faces. I interceded for the foolish young fellow in vain, and we parted angrily, for he had made some rude remarks about my profession."

Whilst this conversation was going on, the two friends were passing under the great arch of the Park Lodge. It returned a hollow echo to their feet as if they were walking over a vault. Just

as they passed it some one moved in the shadow, and stepped towards them, then seeing who it was said, gruffly,—

“Good night!”

Beauflower returned the salutation.

“That is one of those sneaking spies of keepers,” he said, when they were out of earshot. “That is their country cunning—they only say good night to learn who you are by your voice when you reply. Very often I don’t reply, to worry them.”

The moon had not long risen, and just as they turned the corner of the Abbey park wall towards the Vicarage it slipped out of a cloud and rose bright as a silver globe over the dark fir tops. It showed the old grey Vicarage moored like a dismasted ark; a light was moving past a top centre window, a stooping shadow came against the blind; the light disappeared.

“That is mother going to bed,” said Beauflower; “she has got tired of waiting for us.”

“Another proof, my dear boy, that I am better away. We crotchety rich old fellows get very independent. I could sit up now over a book, or with you, and talk half the night, but I won’t, even if you would let me. After all, perhaps,

your life is the healthier. Late hours, are like living on your capital."

"Your self-denial is self-imposed, so I don't pity you. The stars certainly are very glorious to-night. Talk of each being a world, fancy Jordano Bruno,—that friend of Sir Philip Sidney, whom the church, that has made so many martyrs, burned for trying to push a little further into the darkness,—thought the stars were only animals, the earth included."

"The more fool he!"

The Vicar laughed, laid his hand on the latch of his garden door, lifted it, and entered. The moonlight lay half across the lawn like a cloth of silver carpet half rolled back. Something darted across the garden bed and ran up a young apple tree. It was Zoe, the Vicar's favourite kitten, playing a thousand graceful antics to attract his attention, darting down the tree and up again, then climbing upon his shoulder and purring as it felt his fondling hand. It was as glad to see him as a child could be, and even the old cynic stooped to stroke its white breast and squeeze its little soft paws.

"By the bye, why wasn't the doctor there to-night?" he said, as they closed and bolted the hall door very quietly.

"There is a good deal of fever just now at

Stoat's Nest, that cluster of miserable damp cottages down at the further corner of the park, and he's there almost day and night. They're parish patients."

"Glorious profession! Night and day, and chance of fever, for a possible two shillings!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE AVATAR OF MAJOR DONOVAN.

CHRISTMAS was at hand, with its pleasant family parties, that turn out so dull and quarrelsome, and its unpleasant bills, that always turn out heavier than was expected, its holly with the few red berries, which are the presents one receives, and the prickles, which are the Christmas boxes one has to give.

It was the day before Christmas Day; the Fontford road was frozen hard—the broken ice lay in the cart ruts like so much shivered plate glass—the frost spread in feathers and curls on the lattice panes of the windows of Mr. Robinson's lodgings. Mr. and Mrs. Robinson were just finishing breakfast; in fact, Mr. Robinson had already left his last half cup of tea, and was standing by the fire setting his palette, for it was too cold now to paint in the workshop he had dignified with the name of studio. He had put on his little black velvet cap, and was squeezing out worms of colour from his

collapsible tubes with all that anticipation of enjoyment that only a real enthusiast can feel. He eyed with infinite satisfaction the magic circle spread round the polished mahogany, running from flake white and Naples yellow through the siennas (raw sienna and its inferior brother) to the deeper browns, blues, and vermilions. Then, as a skilful archer culls his arrows, he rattled his sheaf of brushes and looked out half-a-dozen favourites for the particular work of the morning. Next he oiled his yesterday's painting with the loving care with which a nurse washes a child's face. Lastly, with a blunt razor he scraped cautiously a piece of impasto.

"John, do finish your tea ; and what are we to do about this bill of Mr. Pitts', it's mounting up dreadful. Then there's all that sherry owing for."

Mr. Robinson looked up from his palette, on which he was bruising some carmine to a delicious liquid crimson under his flat glistening palette knife. He was one of those child-like men (not a sham child like Harold Skimpole), boundlessly sanguine, and utterly heedless of the future. Like most men of this class, he shuddered at being taken from the greenhouse of his own hopefulness and turned into the icy Siberia of the real outer world. He sat and sang and day-dreamed in his

frail vessel, and cared not how near the reef might be till the moment of striking came.

He looked up now with a deprecating look at his too anxious, too unimaginative, entirely practical wife. (How little imagination women have!)

“My dear Jane,” he said, “pray don’t upset me for all the day. Bassevi owes us for three weeks now, and he promised to be here to-day or to-morrow; that will cover everything. Why, you’re as fidgety as when we depended on lodgers, then the major is going to send us down the first quarter’s rent in advance, and, although we owe that, we could take it for the present, if necessary, for Mrs. Lawson’s two weeks. There, don’t distress me about such things, it puts me out for all day.”

“But, my dear John, you are so very thoughtless about money matters, and you know we’re launching out dreadfully, and nothing coming in to warrant it. You used to take your glass of toddy after dinner, now you have sherry like a nobleman. We shall never, never put by anything for dear Amy and for a rainy day if we keep living up so to our means. You know, I must remind you of these things. It’s my duty.”

“What a disagreeable thing duty is, then, Jane. You know it is not like old times now. This pasticcio work will bring in a very considerable

sum — very considerable,” and the little man looked as if he was raking together millions.

“Yes, my dear, so it will, but you forget something might stop the work, a thousand things might happen. Only suppose you were taken ill?”

“Yes, yes, or suppose an earthquake, or a fire of London, or a revolution, or the Last Day that Dr. Cumming has made so much money by.”

“When you begin to talk nonsense and reject my advice, I’ve done, John,” said Mrs. Robinson, gravely, as she put the tea-cups together. “I never wish to intrude my advice, though I do think without it you’d have been a beggar in the workhouse long ago.”

“I really think I should, all in pepper and salt, and painting portraits of Mr., Mrs., and the Miss Bumbles for extra gruel and tobacco,” said Mr. Robinson, in his cheery volatile way; then he put down his palette and brushes, and slipping his hand round his wife’s waist, looked at her fondly (a tear was stealing slowly down her thin worn cheek) and kissed her twice. “I know, Jane,” he said, “know well that without you I should have been a miserable, hopeless man. I didn’t mean to say anything to distress you.”

Just then the door opened, and Mrs. Lawson put in her head; seeing her arrival was *mal à propos*,

she slipped back again, and spoke behind the half open door rather tartly.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Robinson, "I only came just to remind you (it's no consequence of course) but your three weeks are up to-day."

"Quite right, we'll see to it," said Mrs. Robinson, and the door closed. Mrs. Robinson gave her husband a look, but said no more.

"John," she said, "I wonder what brought Mr. Cantelupe here again yesterday?"

"What for? Why, of course, to see my paintings."

"Nonsense, how vain of you, my dear! It was not for that."

"What was it for? I can't see into a mile-stone without my spectacles, so tell me, you wiseacre."

"What for? why, in hopes of seeing Amy. Didn't you observe how he talked about her accident, and how angry he was about the Harkers never letting us up-stairs to see our child?"

"Well, I did think he talked a good deal about Amy; but, bless you, who could see her without loving her?"

"But only fancy, John!"

John looked up from his painting to see what he was to fancy.

"Why, you stupid old thing, suppose this rich young nobleman was to really propose to Amy."

Fancy her a queen at Swallowcliff Castle—carriages, servants, and twenty thousand a year.”

“Yes, and perhaps with a wild, bad young fellow (for we hear he’s wild and reckless with his money), who would neglect her for the next new face. No, not till we know more of my young gentleman.”

Mrs. Robinson was rebuked, and she bowed to the just blow. “But perhaps he would grow steady then, and be a blessing to everyone, and give up racing and gambling.”

“Yes, and perhaps he wouldn’t. No, I don’t say, Jane, I’d refuse my consent, still I’d learn a good deal more about him first: but, Lord, there’s no chance of the thing. Amy must not be given to anyone.”

“Don’t I love her too well, John——”

The rest of the mother’s defence was drowned by a shower of furious blows at the street door, to which Susan, rather frightened, instantly responded. There was a gruff mutter, the next moment the door of the Robinsons’ room flew open, and an enormous man, with a face like Apollo on a winter morning, burst in, shouting with stentorian lungs,

“Then come, my boys, we’ll drink brown ale,
We’ll pay the reck’ning on the nail,
And divil a man shall go to jail,
From Garryowen, my glory.”

It was the redoubtable Major Donovan himself. A slight vaporous reminiscence of Innishowen spread like a halo around his ruddy face and beard. Wrapped in a short rugged nor'-wester, with large horn buttons, and wearing a broad peaked blue cloth cap, with gilt buttons to fasten the chin strap, he resembled very much the captain of a small merchant-vessel, who had half a mind to turn pirate. He flourished a common very heavy oak stick in his Herculean right hand.

"And it's myself that's mighty glad to see ye both," he said, shaking hands with Mr. and Mrs. Robinson alternately. "I've walked over from Slobury, preferring to trust my own legs to any conveyance that ever rowled on whales."

"Well, you do look well, major."

"And we're so glad to see you," echoed Mrs. Robinson, "and so will Amy be—she often talks of you."

"The darlint ! colleen asthore ! Amy machree ! Amy mavourneen !

" Her waist is taper,
None is complater,
Like the tuneful tribe, or the lambs at play,
And her two eyes shining,
Like rowling diamonds,
Her breath as sweet as the flowers in May."

The major was generally rather excitable, but

he seldom sang so much so early in the morning. The fact was, a farmer, who had got in at Basingstoke, had passed round a whisky flask rather too freely, and the spirit had not yet quite evaporated from the giant's brain.

"And you've come down for a long stay?"

"For a fortnight. I'll board with you and get a bed at the inn. The Charlemagne brandy is now drunk everywhere, from Buckingham Palace to Whitechapel, and I am going to diffuse it through all Wiltshire and Dorsetshire.

" ' When Jove made the soul of a wild Irishman,
He filled him with love and creation's wide span
In stature he's matchless, an angel in face,
'Tis mankind that envies his iligant grace,
Philaloo ! ' "

"I feel like a young nightingale this morning, and all along of seeing my old friends, and walking on an empty stomach after being three hours boxed up in the train."

"There, how thoughtless of me, of course you want breakfast, major. I'll make you some tea, and order you a steak in a moment."

"Then by the piper that played before Moses, I won't refuse it."

"But where's your luggage, major?"

The major dived into his tail pocket and produced an old pair of carpet slippers and a shirt

collar, then he rummaged in his waistcoat pocket, pulled out a little Derringer pistol with two barrels, and laid it on the table. "There's my luggage," he said, "I hate boderashun with big trunks, that impede the army and stop quick marches. That little friend of mine I never go without, oh, he's been with me in rough places."

"And were you kind enough, major, to bring us the rent from M. Periklodos?" said Mrs. Robinson anxiously, as she began to re-lay the breakfast.

"Musha! then," said the major, with that soft comethering way that most Irishmen of the major's class can so readily assume, "there's good security for your money, for it's not Mr. Periklodos alone now with this enormous business, but four other partners—Baron Jogler, a Hungarian nobleman, whose breeches pocket is as safe as the Bank of England; M. Chassepot, a French merchant, who has a vineyard in Champagne (look at that now!); Mr. Silas Greenway, who has a large agency in New York; and an enormously rich Parsee merchant, Ramahoor Darkaschunder; so that, you say, the company now represents the four quarters of the world, and one over; and divilish sharp fellows they are, though rather fond of cards in business hours. They've sold already this year, they tell me, 14,204 quart bottles of the Charlemagne cham-

pagne, besides pints ; and, bedad, a glorious tippie it is ! Phew ! it's almost as good as Kinahan's."

"So you've brought the rent ?"

"Well, it's coming by post next Saturday. The company has just had very heavy payments to make to the French dealers, and so I told Mons. Chassepot it was no matter. My salary will come with it ; so it's quite sure, for their money is as good as the Bank. I talked of raising the rent, and they made no objection. Oh, it's the right down jintlemen they are, divil doubt it ! and bad cess to all liars ! May I trouble you, Mrs. Robinson, for another cup of tay ? It's mighty good, I can tell ye."

There came a rap at the door. It was the postman. Susan, rosy and smiling, brought in the letter. It was an angry letter from Bassevi. Mr. Robinson opened it, eagerly expecting to see a little green slip of a cheque fall out, but nothing fell out. He read it, his wife looking over his shoulder.

"CHARLOTTE STREET, FITZROY SQUARE,
December 24, 1860.

"Get on as fast as you like, Robinson. The sooner the first lot is done the better, and then I can draw the tin for it. And now let me just give you warning, my old boy (for I'm deuced riled

with you), if you go blabbing about to every one about those replicas of Bodger's, we shall get some other man. There's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it. Squeamish people don't like to think when they buy a replica that Bodger has only just touched the faces, so you take care, or you'll find you've quarrelled with your bread and cheese. The same with the Abbey and Castle Titians. Don't let young Cantelupe know where you live, and don't put him up to things ; tell any lie to stop him. Now, as to money, I'll send you six pounds to-morrow, when I shall sell some pictures ; the rest will go to pay the interest on the money I advanced you for that carved oak drawing-room furniture, for the ebony cabinet, and buhl chiffonier. I don't think for the Castle pictures I can stand more than fifteen shillings a day, and it won't pay me at that. You have your option, of course. Remember me to my little pet, Amy—I hope she thinks of me sometimes—and your missus. You keep a quiet tongue in your head, and we shall pull on very well together ; but any more blabbing, and you'll never get another sov. out of me ; and what's more, I won't pay you what I owe you without you bring an action, and perhaps not then. So take care ; mind, I warn you. I've just been to the office of that humbugging wine company,

whom you have been old fool enough to trust your house to, and I find that Donovan is down in Wiltshire. If so, tell him I want to employ him there about some sporting matter in which I am interested.

“Yours, &c.,

“ISAAC BASSEVI.”

“Oh, the cruel, cruel man!” said Mrs. Robinson.

“It’s only Bassevi’s rough way,” said the major. “I’ll be bail he means no harm. You play your cards well, and I do believe he’d marry Amy.”

“No, never!” said Mr. Robinson, getting up and waving his palette knife as if it was a sword.

“No, no,” said Mrs. Robinson; “Amy was never saved for that. No, not if we starve for it! What! that man marry my angel?”

“Well, you know your own interest best,” said the major; “but bedad I’ll do the sporting business for him. I think I know a horse’s head from his tail, or my father wasn’t the first vet in all county Kildare, as every man for forty miles round the Curragh still remembers.”

CHAPTER XII.

WRITING THE ADDRESS.

EXACTLY at the day and hour named by Beauflower, Cantelupe was for once punctual, for the cares of the forthcoming contest were heavy upon a mind utterly unaccustomed to steady, continuous thought. He looked very handsome in his short dark-green Newmarket-coat, his white cords, and high boots, as he swung down from his dark bay horse and threw the reins to George, who had been peculiarly taciturn and contrite ever since the celebrated meeting of the "three broken 'arts."

Mary, rosyng very prettily at the sight of the young and distinguished visitor, informed him in her crisp little voice that "master had just gone to the school to see about some books for the children, but that he had left word that he would be back directly. Would he please to walk in?"

He did please to walk in, and was shown up to the Vicar's study. After a vain attempt to dis-

cover a Racing Calendar, a copy of "Silk and Scarlet," Soapy Sponge, or even Nimrod's "Sporting Tour," Cantelupe sank into a state of extreme temporary dejection, with an unholy desire creeping over him to light a cheroot and recklessly enjoy himself, till the voice of old Mrs. Beauflower in the shades chiding Mary for leaving a dust-pan in the passage, which might have broken the gentleman's leg, awed him back into propriety. He then betook himself to the mantelpiece, and was just absorbed in a very pretty photograph of Julia Beauflower in her riding-habit, when he was startled by the door opening and Miss Beauflower herself appearing, perfectly self-collected. She was just a little embarrassed how to amuse the visitor till her brother came, but, like a good sensible girl, she buckled at once to her work. Cantelupe, too, for a young fellow of the world, was rather monosyllabic, and seemed to petrify into one or two topics, all revolving, do what he could, round Miss Robinson's accident, "awfully sorry" he had been, and her convalescence, about which he was "awfully glad." "It was very plucky of her," he said, "getting on the horse at all, and wonderful her sticking to it, and awfully plucky of Beauflower taking the groom's horse and riding straight to her." Gradually as he observed Julia quite at her ease, and

disposed to be amused at his wild, frank way, he, too, found his small talk begin to blossom into conversation of a perfectly natural but rather boyish kind.

“Do you remember,” he said, “how we used to go flying about the country on those Welsh ponies, and how you tried to persuade me not to charge at old Brown’s hurdles, and then how awfully waxy old Brown got when we rode over his young wheat?”

“I know we were very wicked then,” said Julia, laughing, “and that I joined in a great deal of mischief I ought not to have done. Do you remember the putting the squib into the wasp’s nest by the old manor house, and how you teased me because I would not stop to see them dug out?”

“Of course I do. What fun we had, too, at the Abbey that Twelfth Night ball, when I went as a Robber, you as a Cinderella, and your brother as a Magician.”

Julia quite liked him for his remembrance of those thoughtless, pleasant young days. He looked so handsome, too, with the sun-burnt, nut-brown face of a young Englishman who enjoys manly out-of-door sports.

“We have got one or two such wonderful stereoscopes here,” she said, “that some great scientific friend of Ned’s sent us yesterday from London.”

The word "scientific" rather staggered Cantelupe ; but he rallied, and said he should like to see them " awfully."

Julia ran and got them with a charming good nature ; her sarcasm quite disarmed by the expupil's readiness to be pleased. They were really very interesting. One was a stereoscope of the moon, with all its mountains and lakes, looking, for all the world, like a phosphorescent peeled orange ; the other was a photograph of a corner of the field of Magenta the morning after the battle. There were heaps of dead soldiers, you could distinguish the French from the Austrians, and almost guess the cause of their death. Those pierced by bullets had a smile on their lips ; those who had been felled by cavalry swords had a grim and bitter frown of pain on their faces.

"That is too horrid," said Julia ; "let's look at the moon again. Oh, that is beautiful ; you can positively fancy it shines."

In looking at the moon their cheeks almost touched, yet somehow, in their eagerness to see it shine, they neither of them seemed aware of the propinquity. Indeed, they scarcely observed even the door open.

"Well, I'm glad you haven't found me very long," said the Vicar.

"Oh, how do you do, Beauflower ?" said Cante-

lupe, springing up a little confused, yet why, one could hardly imagine. "Oh, not at all; Miss Beauflower has been showing me such a stunning view of the moon. I am afraid I've been awfully boring her with nonsense about our old times here."

"Has he, Ju?" said the Vicar, with a quiet under look.

"Oh, no, he hasn't, Ned. I like talking of old times; but I'll wish you two people good morning, for I know you want to get to politics, and those are things I never could understand."

Cantelupe opened the door, shook Miss Beauflower's proffered hand, and closed the door after her, as the Vicar took off his greatcoat and threw it, with his wide-awake, upon a chair.

"My dear old man," said Cantelupe, "now just you help me with this infernal address. I'm regularly stuck in it."

"Respect your former tutor, Cantelupe, and 'sail in,' as the Yankees say. Come, here's a pen. What is to be?—'Gentlemen——' "

"That's the style—first-rate!"

"Well, what do you want to say?"

"Oh, something about unworthiness, and that sort of thing—you know—proper extension of—of—to meet the necessities of the times."

"Yes; that is very lucid."

"Now, don't chaff a fellow. Put it in your own way. Ballot un-English—strict attention to Parliamentary duties."

"Orders executed with diligence and dispatch."

"Oh, don't chaff; it's a serious business. I don't know what to say—promise anything—strict economy in every department."

"Comes very well from you, you're such a well-known thrifty man."

"Now, that's too bad. If I am a little involved, I shall pull it off with Immenschikoff at Doncaster. I'll bet 1000 to 1 I pull it off there if I can only get Fordham up. Put all your money on, for Menschy will be all there when the numbers go up."

"Thank you, I don't bet. I've got a well, if I want to bury money."

"Oh, you wouldn't lose it; he's bound to win. It'll be all on the square—no scratching."

"Come, come, this doesn't do, you scatterbrains—let's go to work. I suppose this is more what you want, eh?"

Here he wrote, and read as he wrote,—

" 'Gentlemen,—

" 'In offering myself as a Liberal-Conservative candidate——' "

"Go it."

"No slang interruptions, Cantelupe.

“ ‘ In offering myself as a Liberal-Conservative, I feel that I have little claims to your notice, except as the son of one who long and faithfully represented you in the House of Commons. It is for you to enable me to prove that I inherit my father’s zeal for the good cause of progress, cautiously and deliberately pursued.’ ”

“ First class ! Just what I wanted to say ; but they’ll all know it isn’t mine.”

“ Not they ; they’ll only think you’ve got a good lawyer. Let’s go on.

“ ‘ The time has come when the safety of our great empire demands that the base of the social pyramid shall be widened. We will remove nothing, but we will add broad stones to strengthen and to beautify. Let us have compulsory education, as they have in Germany and America. It is no hardship to any honest man to be compelled to fulfil his duties as a citizen, and no one has a right to bring up his children as thieves and paupers.’ ”

“ Isn’t that rather going it ? ”

“ Not a bit. You stick to that, and never mind what party holds the view.

“ ‘ Do not let us try vote by ballot, because that will never make votes secret, and must, therefore, fail in securing the good intended. If a man’s vote is known to his wife, it must be known to his

neighbours, nor can any man's politics be ever concealed from his immediate friends and companions. As to the game laws——' ”

“ Come, gently over that.”

“ Nonsense.

“ ‘As to the game laws, I am of opinion that whether mitigated or not, the evils to which they lead are for the most part to be lessened by the self-restraint of landlords, who should not breed so much game as to cause injury to their servants and poorer neighbours. I would at once abolish the Irish Church, because it only serves the few at the expense of the many. As to reform, I would certainly render bribery penal, and would give a member to every town with a population above a certain number. Being an advocate of universal toleration, I shall vote for every measure calculated to remove disabilities from any sect or persuasion. I shall be a steady friend to all prudent retrenchments, that are conducted in accordance with large-minded views.

“ ‘I am, Gentlemen,

“ ‘Your most obedient servant,

“ ‘FITZGEBERT CANTELUPE.

“ ‘Dec. 30, 1860.’ ”

“ Goloptious !” (The young harum-scarum fairly leaped with delight.) “ That will fetch

them. Awfully kind of you, old fellow ; but how the deuce shall I ever be able to keep this high pressure up ? Well, I suppose Harker will coach me, only he'll think me a downright Rad. about the game laws. I must tone that part down, I think. Still, it's jolly kind of you, old fellow."

"Oh, don't mention it. But I must wish you good-bye now. There's Dr. Briscoe just coming up the walk ; he wants to see me about those miserable cottages of Harker's at Stoa's Nest ; he is dreadfully riled about them, and talked of writing to the papers, but I advised him not."

"Pitch into the beggar—I would."

"It won't do, running your head against a wall. By-the-by, what are you going to give me for the poor Chetwynds ? You got the private circular ?"

"Oh, put me down for 50*l.* ; it's awful hard upon them. Good-bye, Beauflower. Oh, it's not worth thanking me for. Thanks very much for all your trouble. So you're going at the old church at last, I hear."

"Yes, and I'm coming down on you."

"Oh, I'm good for a 50*l.* or so, but you must wait till I've cut down half a dozen more oaks. I've been rather overdoing it lately, to tell you the truth ; and now there's the election : and no bribery, I hear, is expensive."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE VERY GRATIFYING PRESENTATION.

NEW Year's Day had come, mild, sunny, and smiling at the prophecies of spring's rough storms. Nothing was talked of for ten miles round Slobury (a very self-conceited place) but the approaching presentation to Mr. Harker. Only one or two county families had put down their names, still Mr. Pitts took a very prominent part (toadyism not being confined to royal courts, by any means), and still more foremost was Mr. Paradise, the principal brewer of Salisbury, who had headed the subscription list with 100*l.*, his gratitude being a lively anticipation of favours to come, and a great hope of his beer-shops in future getting their licences renewed without much wrangling with the police. Mr. Cutbush, too, a retired nursery gardener, who had recently bought a large property near Compton Chamberlayne, was also conspicuous in the subscription list, being anxious to know Lord Mazagan,

through the Harkers' influence. A few squires had given, not to be outdone by their neighbours, and others for fear of seeming mean. Such are the mean motives that swell most subscription lists.

The day came, as bright and fine a New Year's Day as ever ushered in a ridiculous ceremonial. The sky was cold and blue, without a cloud, except an undefined line of white vapour here and there to the west. The Slobury road was wrinkled and hard as the hide of an elephant. A slight shower in the night had sprinkled the road-side trees, and the drops, frozen on the boughs, glistened like jewelry. The four vans with the cold collation from Gunter's had just arrived at the Abbey back-gate from the Slobury station, when Paddy Blake, bare-footed as usual, and in that inevitable muddy ragged scarlet coat, the badge of his ambiguous profession, pushed his way among the fussy men helping down the hampers and cases, and requested speech of Mr. Harker. "Very important business."

"Important business! I like that," sneered a hot young footman (rather irritable at the unusual amount of work, and more than usually self-important). "I say, Fred, you pal of mine,

'He's a pal of mine, he's a pal of mine,'

did you ever hear anything like this fellow's

cheek? Go away, Paddy. Call again to-morrow. Master, I tell you, is busy with a gentleman about the decorations. I know he won't see any one till the deputation comes. Friday is the day for seeing him."

"If he won't, all the worse for him."

"Now, don't you hang about: be off. This is not the Castle stables. Go and put your money on Immenschikoff."

"That I will, every penny—trust me, young bottle-washer."

So Paddy slunk away with his unheeded warning.

About twelve o'clock the trains at Slobury began to disgorge hearty, red-faced, boisterous, burly men, all very much alike, in leather gaiters, several pale, smooth-faced, obsequious, low-voiced men in black, one or two of the old top-boot race of farmers, and a gentleman or two, who seemed as uncomfortable as if they were going to a wedding. These were presently joined by tradesmen and farmers from Slobury, who looked on that place as the end of all things, and most other people as outer barbarians; and all these persons, taking the road or field-way to Summerleas, were joined at by-roads and cross-roads by farmers riding and driving, who gave their friends lifts. At the Peal of Bells there was a crowd assembled of

labourers, women, and children, who cheered every one, they hardly knew why, but just to give vent to their excitement, not really caring indeed whether Mr. Harker was born, married, or buried, so bread would keep down, and wages go up.

It had been agreed by the Committee a few days before, and duly advertised in the Salisbury and Winchester Journal, that the subscribers should meet not at Slobury, but at the Great Archway, where Travers lived, and from thence, at one o'clock precisely, move on, with the Rifle band playing before it, to the Abbey. And so they did. The procession was gradually got into form by Mr. Pitts and the landlord of the Harker Arms at Fontford, who was an active sergeant in the Rifles, and at a few minutes past one, the Committee, with blue cockades in their hats, and blue favours on their breasts (like prize turkeys), led the shambling regiment of philanthropists through the great frowning archway to the appropriate tune of "The Young Recruit," which, at the turn to the drive, was modified into "Champagne Charley," and at the Abbey door swelled into "The Red, White, and Blue." The two cracked bells of Fontford were doing their miserable best to express sympathy in the universal joy, while the three jangling bells of Summerleas were clanging away under

charge of George, whose temperance, to judge by the smell of ale in the belfry, was now in the most imminent danger. "Hang Tom Paine, who'll help we," went the Summerleas bells as old Mr. Beauflower used to say. "We wool," answered the peal of Fontford. "One, two, three, four, five—one, three—one, two—five," carolled the full and silvery peal of Slobury.

At the Abbey an amateur band from Bibury welcomed them with "Campdown Races," fading into, "The Girl I left behind Me." The Harkers' servants, in claret and canary, were all waiting in the portico to usher in the guests. The female servants were at the stair windows. Tremendous cheering when Mr. and Mrs. Harker advanced and shook hands with the prize turkeys. Business began with general wine and cakes, on which the great hearty farmers fastened like blood-hounds, tipping each other's glasses, and thinking it "the right thing" to drink each other's health and shout out "Here's to 'ee, Mr. Harker," or "I looks towards ye, marm."

The babble of chatter and laughter was hushed at last by the furious blow of a stick (as if a headsman had just cut off Mr. Harker's head) on the table. It was the chairman of the Committee ready for immediate action.

"Silence! silence for the chair," shouted forty

or fifty eager voices, inured to shouting to and at ploughmen and shepherds—the excited farmers forgetting they were not at the Harker Arms, and that there was no chair.

“Gentlemen,” shouted Mr. Pitts, “we all know what we have met for here to-day ; and I am the unworthy individual delegated—if I may use such an expression—delegated to be your spokesman. We have met here to-day in such large numbers to express our visible sense of the virtue, generosity, high feeling, benevolence, and public spirit of a certain gentleman. We have known him now for many years, and have always found him kind, hospitable, courteous, and without pride. I might say we do not value him the less, because he is true blue to the core (tremendous cheering and laughter) ; and if I do say so, I trust any Rads or Yellow Boys here will forgive me (great laughter). I have not the gift of eloquence, gentlemen. (Yes.) I will, therefore only say that we, the gentlemen, yeomen, and tradesmen of South Wiltshire, present this silver dinner service to Mr. Harker, of Summerleas Abbey, in testimony of our extreme regard, esteem, and affection (an earthquake of applause—one yeoman, who had taken too much brandy-and-water at the Harker Arms, even threw up his hat—then Kentish fire, and what the Ame-

ricans call a "tiger"—that is, a wild howl of admiration).

Mr. Harker rose, like Neptune after a gale, eyes downcast, voice tremulous with all the emotion of a fashionable preacher. Three times he essayed to begin, three times his emotion checked him, and he had to sip the edge of an empty tumbler, which did extremely well. We need not report (though of course we shall) his speech, which was duly kneaded into the table by the speaker's inverted knuckles. He never had expected to witness such a sight as had just dawned upon him—a man without rank or title, yet always zealous to win his neighbours' esteem, and to encourage country sports and all generous movements. Till the last throb of his heart, he hoped to show to his friends the splendid testimonial that day presented to him, &c., &c. He would now, therefore, if they would do him the honour, lead them the way to the room where a very humble cold collation had been laid out for their refreshment.

"Refreshment" cue for the band, which instantly slewed round right and left of the hall, and struck up "See the Conquering Hero comes," shortly to be modified into the "Roast Beef of Old England." The guests, led by Mr. and Mrs. Harker, with as much promptitude as if they

had been drilled for a Drury Lane tableau, instantly defiled after the noble pair—Lord Maza-gan following with Miss Harker. Cantelupe had unaccountably absented himself; in fact, to tell the plain truth, he was quietly having lunch with the Robinsons, who had been allowed to have Amy home that whole day. The tune ceased. The trumpets struck up a flourish, as the folding doors were sharply unlocked and pompously thrown back. The cold collation was there almost intact (two cold pheasants only were missing), but the silver dinner service, the presentation plate, the 220*l.* worth, was gone, *stolen*.

Paddy Blake, who was outside among the villagers, heard the shout of dismay, and grinned wickedly as he pushed at the backs of the others. P. C. Archer, treating virtue more than ever as a thing to be regarded with tolerance, but suspicion, burst through the crowd and asserted himself. He examined the bolts of the glass windows, they were open. He sprang on to the lawn, there were foot-marks of two men on the frosty grass. He tracked them to a side gate where there were recent marks of the wheels of a dog-cart on the Wiley road. Wiley was a station of the Great Western. We cannot stop to sketch Mr. Harker's indignation, or the general rage, surprise, and vexation. The two commercial tra-

vellers at the Slobury Railway Hotel had left that morning in a dog-cart, with a square black chest. They were to be back at night. They never returned—their trunks were found full of flints and brickbats, together with a copy of Ainsworth's improving novel, "Jack Sheppard;" a flash song book, two false beards and a reversible coat. "They were the boys," P. C. Archer said, grimly posting it all up. Major Donovan had indeed met them that very morning at twelve near the side park gate. Mr. Bassevi, who had arranged the plate tastefully and to Mr. Harker's great satisfaction, had left the room windows and door locked at twenty minutes to twelve. It was generally supposed that the pseudo-commercial travellers were professional London thieves, "old hands," and that they had either got hold of some servant of the house; or had contrived to meet in the train, as he returned, the jeweller's man who brought the service from Salisbury the night before, and worm out of him the time when it would be placed, and other particulars. Mr. Travers, the head-keeper, also threw some little light on the matter, for he had met the two men whom he had seen at the Railway Hotel, lurking about the Abbey Wood, pretending they had lost the way. He warned them off civilly, they thanked him, and offered him a cigar. It was

all "up," P. C. Vincent thought, and the London police agreed with him.

The plate had no doubt been whipped off to London by fast train, just caught, hammered at once into lumps, and melted into white sauce ten minutes after it reached Whitechapel. Anyhow this is certain, it was never heard of again, nor did a fresh subscription list spring up, although Mr. Bassevi privately offered the Committee as a great bargain the solid silver service, good as new, of Baron Slippenback, the late ambassador from Oberkopfundoehrinde. A subscription list, as Lord Chatham said of confidence, is a plant of slow growth.

Poor Paddy Blake was taken up on suspicion, but as he remained prudently silent on certain matters, nothing could be proved against him. He had only come that morning, he said, to present a begging petition, he had then gone and had some beer at the Peal of Bells, and after that had been in the crowd the whole time talking to George, Mr. Beauflower's gardener, and Penny, Farmer Brown's carter.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DRIEST OF DREE.

THE Harkers went to town in February and took Amy with them, much to the Vicar's regret ; indeed it made quite a blank in the pleasant little circle of the Robinsons, Dr. Briscoe, Miss Chivers, and the Chetwynds. They returned in great state about the middle of March, to give a round of county parties before the election for Slobury, and before returning to their London home in Piccadilly for the season.

It was an early March day ; the leafless sloe, reckless prodigal, was already in flower, and the buckthorn would soon follow suit. The elder was already opening its yellow green leaves, and the sticky chestnut buds were beginning to throw off their dark waterproofs. The little brushwood round the old elms was brightening and glimmering with glimpses of emerald leaflets. The disconsolate leafless yellow jasmin was in flower, the almond trees were in a glow of creamy

pink, the crocuses had long since thrust their golden spear-heads through the dark earth. The rooks sat watching somewhat ruefully their great bushes of nests up in the Abbey trees, as if the cares of the married state had somewhat exceeded their expectations. Every now and then a thrush sent forth a trial note, and then relapsed into a vague warble, as if turning up a little prematurely for the great opening concert of the May season. Everywhere, however, in spite of the cold winds, those last roarings of the lion that usher in the lamb, life and hope began to assert themselves, and prepare for the annual resurrection from the dead. Green leaves rose like magic in the dry withered brake, just as hope revives in a frozen heart ; little fairy plants of countless forms of disregarded beauty, came to pay court to the Lady Primrose as their queen. Even the ground-ivy spread its white-veined leaves more rejoicingly, and began to believe in the possibility of summer ; while in the brook the cresses thickened greener, and the trout darted faster between the long wavering drifts of weed that rippled like mermaids' hair.

Mr. Harker, passing over the great arch floor that sounded hollow as a grave under his heavy tread, walked slowly up the road that turned off to the village of Summerleas and passed the Vicarage. He had a heavy gold-mounted pimento stick in

one hand, and a folded newspaper in the other. He stood for a moment at the turning like a man who had not quite decided on a certain line of action, and looked towards the village. He sneered as he saw a scaffolding erected round the old square church tower, and men in the churchyard preparing mortar, and squaring stones from the Tisbury quarries.

"Fool," he said to himself, "beginning without counting the cost, but he'll suffer for it. I won't lift my finger to help him, unless I have my own way in everything. He has thwarted me once already, he shan't do it again."

As he stood there the front door opened, and Beauflower and his sister came out chatting with worthy old Miss Chivers, and showing her a japonica under the drawing-room window that was in a mass of crimson bloom. They saw Harker and bowed, and Harker took off his hat in return.

He stood there for a moment or two more, watching a handful of dead leaves which hopelessly passed him down the dry cold road, and then turned towards the lodge. A smart dark green dog-cart, wheels picked out with white, and drawn by a good-looking horse, stood at Travers's door, in care of a boy. The door was open, and Mr. Harker stepped in sternly. The room was handsomely furnished, new chairs, curtains, look-

ing-glass, sofa, all new, and contrasting strangely with the plain rows of blue plates of an ordinary poor man's house. The keeper's wife, a coarse timid drudge, was washing up some dishes at a side dresser, and two rough neglected looking children were playing by the fire, one dragging about a little cart filled with sacks of sawdust, the bigger one playing with a dead owl.

"Is Travers in?" said Mr. Harker, peremptorily.

"He's in the other house, sir, cleaning a gun. Shall I call him, sir?"

"No, never mind, I'll go to him."

As Mr. Harker stepped across the archway to the opposite room, a young game-keeper with his gun under his arm came from it, and a harsh voice shouted after him—

"Kill 'em everyone, I say."

The man touched his hat respectfully as he passed, and Mr. Harker entered at the open door. Travers was there with his back to the door, one foot on a chair, oiling a gun-barrel that rested on his right knee. He had on a new black velvet shooting jacket with bronze sporting buttons, and a long drab cloth waistcoat. His favourite one-eyed terrier was by his side as usual. He turned round when Mr. Harker entered, and greeted him with an insolently familiar nod.

"You seem to forget who I am?" said Mr. Harker.

"Oh no, I don't forget; but what use is it being civil? you wouldn't believe I mean it, so I shan't try. We understand each other, that's sufficient, Mr. Harker. I know well enough you'll get rid of me if you can, but you can't, and that's all about it."

"Have you seen the letter in to-day's Salisbury Journal?"

"No. I don't get my paper till the afternoon. What's the letter about—you or me?"

"You shall hear." Mr. Harker unfolded the paper, sat down at the window, and read the following—the Wiltshire dialect of which we purposely suppress. It was headed—"A COINCIDENCE."

"SALISBURY, March 14, 1861.

"DEAR MASTER HEADEATER,—

"How odd things do happen! Last Friday as I and two of Squire Howard's shepherds as 'ad comed in to attend the market were passing down Catherine Street rather the worse for dree gallons of ale, as Farmer Johnson of Knoyle ad gien us, we ran just at the door of the furrier's shop (No. 27), full butt against the head kipper of Squire Harker of Summerleas, one of

the most zealous sportsmen as follows the hounds that Mr. Cantelupe hunts. We had always heard of Muster Harker's zeal for the noble sport, and were therefore somewhat surprised when, as we jolted against kipper, a loose parcel of foxes skins fell from under his arm. He scrabbled them up directly under the paper and said they were rabbits, but that cock won't fight. Perhaps this may account, Mr. Headeater, for Muster Cantelupe's hounds so seldom finding in the Summerleas Woods.

"I am, dear Muster Headeater,

"THE DRIEST OF THE DREE."

(Driest of the Three.)

"Do you know what rascal wrote that lie?"

Travers grinned mischievously. "I think I do. It's Paddy Blake and his friend the drunken schoolmaster, at Birdbrook. I saw them together last week at the Peal of Bells, and I thought they were up to some mischief."

"I will write to-day and contradict it."

"You'd better not."

"Why?"

"Because, look here, it's all true. Paddy Blake and two other men did see the parcel fall last market day. If you write to contradict it, I shall write to say it's true."

"You'd better take care, Travers."

"I shan't take no care whatever. I warn you, if you write and contradict this, I will write and tell who gave me orders to kill all the foxes."

"Take care, take care."

"It's you to take care, mister. You know what I know. It's you who have to be afraid. I tell you I did drop the skins, I didn't go to drop them, but they dropped of themselves, and they was seen. It can't be helped, and it's no use being rusty about it; but if you write and say it's a lie, I'll write and say it's true, and that they were foxes, killed by your orders; so make the best of that."

Mr. Harker slammed the door behind him, and walked away. His eyes rolled like those of a madman, a cold dew broke out on his upper lip.

"If murder was only a little safer," he muttered to himself, raising his stick as if it was an axe, "I'd kill that man."

A shadow moving within his shadow heard those words, and descended with them at once to the abodes of the lost.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FARMER'S ORDINARY.

MARKET day at Bibury is, and always has been, a lively, bustling day. Great trotting of irregular cavalry from earliest morning; great tossing up of handfuls of corn from sample sacks in the corn-market; great exchange of heavy professional jokes, turning on the rotation of crops, the price of oats, and other playful matters; great bawling out by Cheap Jacks of the extraordinary merits of Birmingham halter chains, many-bladed knives, cart-whips, boot-laces, and such articles.

It is a day when gaunt horses in the central street, stimulated by Indian spices, strangely administered, and punched in the ribs till they are nearly stove in, and coaxed into wild gambadoes and ceaseless trots—a day when acrobats, tired with long and thirsty pilgrimages over the Downs rouse themselves once more with “sups” of gin, and spit fire, swallow knives, and spin

brass bowls for hours, with a well-assumed air of enjoyment, urged on by the hopes of a good dinner for one day at least.

All day, from nine o'clock when the first carts began to arrive, till four, when the farmer's ordinary broke up, and the farmers began to remount for home, there was a ceaseless working in and out of the Blue Boar and the White Hart. There was also much lively bargaining for hats, coats, cigar cases, copper kettles, garden rollers, mowing machines, chain harrows, and other useful and ornamental things, to the thorough waking up of the dead-alive old Abbey town, which the next day, exhausted by its "little hour" of dissipation, would fall into the most melancholy collapse that could well be conceived.

On this particular market day unusual excitement prevailed among the buyers and sellers of corn and sheep, from the fact that young Brown, several times remanded in order to obtain fresh evidence, was to be brought up for final examination. Mr. Harker was present, but refused to sit as a magistrate, he being personally interested in the case. Travers and the keepers were all there (a mass of brown velveteen and leggings). To add to the excitement of the day, every blank wall was plastered with staring blue and yellow,

addresses from the several candidates of the forthcoming Bibury election.

Lord Mazagan, Mr. Cantelupe, Colonel Harcourt, took their seats on the bench at eleven precisely. Near them sat Mr. Harker. Dr. Briscoe had stolen a morning to hear the case, in which he felt great interest and by his side was Mr. Goodrick, whom he had driven over, as that gentleman had some business in the town with a decorator. Beauflower, too, had ridden over at old Brown's particular request, and had a seat on the bench beside his friends, and Major Donovan, who had come over in a light cart with the landlord of the Harker Arms, was prominent in the crowd. The court was full of sympathising farmers, townspeople, gamekeepers, and tradesmen. There was a slight murmur of kindly feeling when young Brown appeared in the box, rather paler than usual, but gay and careless as ever. He nodded to all his friends, and bowed to the Bench. There was a recent scar upon his left temple, which Travers pointed out mockingly to the bystanders. The young fellow's bail had been refused till the extent of the keeper's injuries could be ascertained.

"Call in Thomas Archer, police constable," said the clerk of the Court, a little testy, sharp, bustling, red whiskered attorney. The impertur-

bable policeman appeared, and deponed that the night of the fight in Bagley Wood he was walking on the road to Fontford, when he met Mr. Travers and two other keepers ; they had just had a tussle with poachers ; one of the keepers had had his hat shot through ; another had had a stab in the shoulders. Mr. Travers, too, was bleeding at the mouth and the temple. The poachers had got off, but the keepers all agreed that the prisoner, young Mr. Brown, was one of the men ; and Travers said ——”

“ We don’t want to hear what Mr. Travers said,” snapped the impatient clerk, with an air of despair ; “ that’ll do, Archer, go down. Call Robert Travers.”

Mr. Travers then gave his version of the story in a blustering way. “ The night was dark, but the moon rose just before they met the poachers. While he was striking at one of the men who had attacked him with the butt end of a gun, the poacher’s crape mask blew up, and he saw it was the prisoner—he would swear it.”

“ Why, man, you are swearing it,” said Lord Mazagan, angrily.

“ How much of the fellow’s face did you see ? ” said Colonel Harcourt. “ Now, sir, on your oath—we must have this clear.”

“ I saw his mouth, and chin, and part of his

whiskers. They were of the same colour as the prisoner's. He had on a brown greatcoat."

A murmur ran through the court, fiercely checked by Mr. Brice, the red-whiskered terrier. The magistrates put their heads together, and Cantelupe looked at Beauflower, as much as to say,—this won't do, you know.

The young fellow's defence was well made out by Mr. Raynard, a sharp attorney from Salisbury. He called reliable witnesses to prove that exactly a quarter of an hour before the fight, Brown was playing at billiards at the Railway Hotel, Slobury, with two commercial men, who, it was singular enough, had since been discovered to be the members of the swell mob who carried off Mr. Harker's Presentation Plate, and accomplices of a gang well known in Scotland Yard as card-sharpers. Brown lost 5*l.* to them in the second game, then suspecting he had got into bad hands, he had called for a glass of brandy and water, and ridden on to Swallowcliff to sup with the head groom there. He left Swallowcliff at nine o'clock, and reached home a little before ten. He had on a white waterproof.

Here Mr. Harker whispered some suggestions to Mr. Ferret, who was conducting his case. It was suggested that the marker at the billiard room, who deponed to the time, might be half-an-

hour wrong, and that Brown, changing his coat, had perhaps dashed off across country to keep an engagement with the poachers at the wood, which was on the Slobury side of the Abbey property. The marker, being cross-examined, confessed that the clock was five minutes or more slow.

Old Brown looked very worn and anxious as Mr. Harker leaned across Dr. Briscoe, and whispered audibly to Beauflower—

“You’ll see he’ll be committed at once.”

The magistrates retired for a quarter of an hour ; at the end of that time they returned, and Lord Mazagan instantly discharged the prisoner. There was no evidence, he said, at all satisfactory or sufficient to connect him with the assault upon the keeper.

Young Brown, bowing to the Bench, instantly vaulted down among his friends, who, with a tremendous shout of exultation, lifted him on their shoulders and bore him off in triumph.

“Silence in the court !” barked the clerk. But it was in vain. The shout, like the shout when the seven bishops were acquitted, spread into the street, and from the street into the market-place, till all Bibury rang with it. It was in vain to pounce upon any offender for contempt of the unpaid administrators of justice, for a hundred people at least had shouted, and they were all

scattered now over the resounding town. Mr. Harker was silently furious, his rage being usually of a snakish and mute kind. Mr. Cantelupe offered consolation.

"The case hadn't really a leg to stand on. Travers said, last time, he saw the prisoner's whole face. Really couldn't work it."

"Stuff and nonsense," said Mr. Harker. "If it had gone before the Duke the rascal would have been committed on the first hearing. Harkcourt's an old fool—always some ridiculous scruples—because he has no game himself."

In the meantime the Browns and all their adherents had hurried off to the "Blue Boar" to be in time for the farmer's ordinary at half-past one. There was a great trampling upstairs at the "Blue Boar," and many were the noisy and laughing greetings to the good-natured landlady in the blue ribbons.

The ordinary was held in a large first-floor room, that looked half like a billiard-room and half like two bedrooms knocked into one. There were no chandeliers and no looking-glasses, and, with its great staring wall-paper (bunches of roses as large as cabbages), and no sofas, it looked very new, raw, and uninviting. A long table stood at either side of the room, as at a school, and a cross table at the top, by the windows,

bracketed these together. It was all noise, serious eating, and bustle. There were trains to catch and business to conclude: there was no time for dallying over side-dishes, and not much for quiet comfort. The hearty Wiltshire dialect raged all over the room; hard, dogged, rugged, honest Saxon, spoken with closed lips to keep out the cold, the D always standing for the T, and the Z for the S, as in George's story to the Vicar. "Noa, I can't get a drop mwore down 'un; drow't auver m' veace."

As the crowd jostled good-naturedly to their seats, hungry as lions, every one who met good old Farmer Brown and his son shook hands with them so heartily that the tears rose in the good old fellow's eyes as he sat down between two sandy giants from Dorsetshire way, and his son took a chair opposite.

"Well, Farmer Brown, can I have ten sacks more of them kidneys?" shouted the stentorian chairman, who was hewing at an unctuous mountain of boiled beef.

"I han't got narn more, Muster Bletchworth; and bezides, I do want 'un mezelf, don't I, Bob?"

This favourite and durable old Wiltshire joke was received with uproarious applause, as four or five joints were placed on the table simultaneously. Farmers, when in society, have generally

a quaint custom of resting on their oars after being helped, and waiting till everybody can begin at once ; but now at the ordinary they were too hungry, besides people kept dropping in irregularly ; but another country custom they zealously observed, and that was to eat in solemn silence for the first ten minutes or so. For ten minutes no noise but the clatter of knives and forks, and a file firing of "Thankee, a little bit more," "I'll thankee for some more beef," "I say you, some beer here," "Pass the greens," and so on ; but gradually the fury of the contest abated : the eating grew more languid, the carvers had to coax and the waiters to suggest. By the time the great cheeses moved round, the more alert men were getting their money ready to pay, and one purple-faced old fellow in top boots had actually called three times for brandy-and-water, and lit a long white pipe at a side table, from whence he viewed the ebbing battle, as Jove does man's puny struggles, with kindly composure, though afar off. Bargain-makers were now wrangling over the old hitch, and some of the more excitable, already rather flushed with beer, were haranguing on the general oppression of landlords, and proposing a petition in the county papers against the cruel destruction caused by rabbits, hares, and pheasants.

Farmer Brown, glorious as Tam o' Shanter at his recent victory, and warmed by a second mahogany-coloured tumbler of brown brandy-and-water, was brimming over with geniality. The chairman, who had abdicated and come down near him, was insisting on one of his "vamous" stories.

"Dang it! which'll you have, Mr. Bletchworth. I'm not going to spoil the arternoon for the sake of a little breath, not as mine is as good as it was, since I caught th' asthma, getting wet at 'Vizes fair six years last Michaelmas."

"Why, William Little's story, to be zure, of the owld lady of Warminster, and the sit-down chayer."

"Well, here goes, boys—pass the spills—thank 'ee. Bob, lad, call for what ye do like, and dont'ee be aveard on't. I spose they won't allow 'ee cigars in prezun. Well, here's the plain story, such as it is. When Miss Barnzo first coomed to Warminster, her went out a visitin' in one o' they there things um calls a zit-down chayer. Zo, when th' two chaps as car'd her knocked at the dower o' Miss Curtis's house, owld Zarah, th' zarvent—you remember owld Zarah—aupened un, and cried out, 'Noa, noa! gwo away! Missus doan't encourage none of them zart o' wosbirds!' By-and-by um knocks again, bold as brass, and then th' owld body coomed out, this time in a

towerin' pashun, hakerin' and zhakin' her vist at um. ' 'Oman, 'oman,' says Miss Barnzo, putting her yead out o' th' thing, 'I dezires you take up thick keard to your missus *directly*.' Zo, owld Zarah takes the keard, and upstairs a gwoes. 'They won't gwo away, missus,' zays she, 'noa, that um won't no how.' 'Who won't, Zarah?' axed Miss Curtis. 'The man as gi'ed I this here keard, missus,' says Zarah, a putting th' keard upon th' table. 'Punch and Judy! I told um you didn't want to zee non' o' them oonderments!' "

How the glasses shook with the Cyclopean laughter that this sound old story, and others, soled, heeled, and vamped, caused. It seemed to rouse all the past laughter it had ever caused; even young greenhorn farmers, who had never been as far as Bath, and who would not have known a Sedan chair if they had seen one, laughed as boisterously as the rest; Farmer Brown then told his almost equally famous story of stingy old Squire Puddle, "who used to bargain wi' owld Smith, the mole-catcher, to catch all the moles at tuppence a yead. When the traps were set the stingy old oosbird used to get up avore zunrise, gwo to the trap, take out the oont (mole) and steal the trap; this saved him the tuppence to owld Smith, and got un a trap into the bargain.

Zo, when a died," the story concluded, "um vound two or dree score o' oont traps put by in a cubberd!"

But perhaps the most successful hit of Farmer Brown's was a retort made by him on an unlucky veterinary surgeon, who ventured to stand up for Mr. Harker, and other game preservers.

"Ah," said he, "Muster Willum, you be like Jim Pinnegar, who thought vlies were sooner caught with honey than vinegar. You know what Jim said one night, when he ran agin a jackass in the night, and thought it was the owld gentleman. Why, he cot un by th' ear, and said, 'how zaft your horn is, zur!' says Jim."

This retort took, it ran like fire through straw, venerable as it was, and young Brown, when the stamping and beating of fists had a little subsided, shouted to one of the servants who were waiting,

"Bring glasses round."

The indisputable fact was that, what with excitement, the change of living, and the indiscreet good-nature of his friends, young Brown was fast getting extremely and noisily drunk. One or two men near him were pressing him to go; others, residents of Slobury, were shouting to him to stop and make a night of it.

Mr. Bletchworth, a sturdy farmer of the good old dogged type, saw the necessity of promptitude.

Young Brown was trying to stand up and make a speech about the tyrannical way in which he had been used, and the shame of his bail being refused. A red-faced, violent, blustering man next him was on his legs, too, shouting,—

“That it was wusser than a Rooshian or a Prooshian court, and that he’d see justice done to his friend Brown.”

It is usual in most country discussions to thus unjustifiably bracket Prussia and Russia.

The chairman, who had already paid his bill with the dignity becoming the chairman of so august an assembly, now rose upon his legs and determinately buttoned his big coat across his enormous chest.

“Who’s for my way,” he shouted, with the voice of a Polyphemus ’bus conductor who has lately dined. “Any one for Slobury? I’m off. Come along, Brown; mop up, Bob. It will be dark long before we get home.”

“Whatsh dark? who caresh for dark? I say I have been cruelly imprishned. I ant a dog, am I? Bennet, am I a dog?”

Bennet, a smiling, quiet, stout man, placidly smoking a pipe, next him, assured him that to the best of his belief he was not.

“Come along, Bob,” said old Brown; “good even, gentlemen all.”

And young Brown, like the fisherman in Goethe's Mermaid, half yielding, half compelled, was persuaded out of the room.

"I tell you what, gents," said young Brown's evil persuader, "shan't us see him hum? Let's give him music hum, there's half-a-dozen of us here in the town of the Rifle band, we can get our instruments in a moment, and we'll make a night of it at Slobury and sleep at the Railway Hotel if we can't get no other beds. We'll play all through Summerleas, and give old Harker a salute at the Abbey; that'll teach him to pull up innercent people."

"Ay, that ar will. Look alive, lads," cried a second of the mischief makers, and in less than ten minutes, in spite of all Farmer Brown's "dонт'ee; now, донт'ee!" a cavalcade of six or seven light carts, gigs, and chaises, set out for Slobury, preceded by a chaise containing two cornets and two ophicleides, playing "Johnny comes marching Home" defiantly, loudly chorussed by audacious young Brown, who, as the cavalcade passed Mr. Harker's barouche with that gentleman in it leaning back, very dark and sullen, shouted, in spite of all his father's pinches and pullings,—

"Where's the plate? Who stole the plate? Yah!"

And, indeed, he even got so audaciously outrageous that he tried to snatch his father's whip, and make a cut at Mr. Harker's sour and indignant coachman.

It was at this very moment that Mr. Beauflower overtook the noisy procession; it was about two miles out of Bibury. He pulled up his horse, and begged Farmer Brown not to make any demonstration in Summerleas.

"I must confess," he said, "Mr. Brown, that I think your son has been rather severely used."

"Shamef'ully ushed," hiccupped young Brown.

"But he is free now, and you have won the victory over his accusers. Now, take my advice, don't push it further. It will only produce bad blood, and tend to no other earthly result. Robert was not with the poachers——"

"Yesh I wash; I wash all there, and if I'sh been there earlier thingsh very different," shouted the incorrigible.

"Don't you listen to what Bob says. I've begged and prayed him, Mr. Beauflower," said old Brown, "not to let his friends bring their music, but they would have it; they've most taken just a drop too much, and they won't listen to me no more than a mad bull will listen to a butcher."

It was evidently quite hopeless to preach moderation any further, so Beauflower cantered on,

cheered by the whole party, who instantly struck up "Three cheers for the Red, White, and Blue," and blared a drunken chorus on their brazen instruments.

While the Vicar had been speaking to Brown, Travers had driven past, and eyed him maliciously, as much as to say,—

"Ah! I thought he was in with them."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WATERFALL.

“I HAVE a great idea,” said Mr. Goodrick, one morning in the Vicar’s study, it being his daily custom now to first go and see how the men got on with his improvements, then to walk on to Summerleas, and read the “Times” at the Vicarage. “I have a great idea of devoting the rest of my life to a literary work of research.”

“Indeed. What work?”

“The ‘History of Humbug,’ sir. Humbug in all its branches. Humbug of lawyers, humbug of doctors, humbug of clergymen. Yes, I shall not shirk that last branch. The work will embrace Universal Mythology, Quackery, and Chicanery; and will include Universal Superstition, and the Progress of Luxury from the Creation.”

“An extensive subject,” said Beauflower, smiling, as he shut an atlas he was consulting, and prepared to listen.

“Yes, its roots spread wide. By the bye, Beau-

flower, I met Harker this morning. He was very grand, driving over to Bibury, about young Cantelupe's election, I suppose; but the great man deigned to notice me. He actually bowed, and in a most condescending way. Ugh! How is it that people who have carriages always seem to put on that manner, as if nothing outside the carriage was or could be worth regarding? Where does that come from?"

"From the pride of those they do not notice. I dare say you are the same when you're in your carriage. Well, what did you do in London? Julia is very curious to know if you went to buy pictures. She's becoming quite a connoisseur under your instructions."

"Well, I bid for some pictures at Christie's, but they were going too high. There was only one thing there (a Velasquez), really worth having. I saw the German people about the jewels for Berlin. They are to have some of mine; but come, I'll tell you what I did see. I saw some Divers."

"Divers? What are they? birds?"

"Birds! no, men. I have a sort of Vampyre theory; it is one of my eccentricities, that people never really die, they only disappear, dive, that is, and come out again, by a sort of metempsychosis, in a new stage of existence. Every now and then I recognise one of these divers. There

was a man I used to know on the Stock Exchange, a fat red-faced man, fond of port-wine and a coarse joke. He died (as they call it), three years ago I read his death in the 'Times.' Well, sir, if you'll believe it, I met that man last Tuesday, the driver of a Brompton 'bus, stopping at a tavern door in South Kensington, apparently as thirsty and as fond of a joke as ever."

"Perhaps he levanted. They have done such things on the Stock Exchange."

"Oh, no ! not he. He regularly died ; but there he was driving the 'bus, the same man, nose, eyes, mouth, manner, habits. A picture-dealer I once knew in Wardour Street I met last Christmas, selling penny papers. No, people don't die, they only dive."

Mr. Goodrick had risen and gone to the window as he uttered these last remarks, and he now called Beauflower.

"Just come and see this fellow," he said ; "was there ever such a Jack in office ; there he goes and all his retinue."

The Vicar came to the window. It was Travers passing, his gun on his shoulder, his one-eyed terrier at his heels, behind him an obsequious band of under-keepers and beaters, with guns, sticks, and nets. Travers was occasionally turning round to give directions in a loud voice

to his attendants, one of whom would occasionally trot up to him, exchange a remark, and then be dismissed to the rear. As they passed over the bridge, and approached the Vicarage, Travers looked towards it, and made some remark, at which the whole of the men burst into a coarse laugh.

"That was a hit at you, Beauflower, I'd wager," said Mr. Goodrick; "because he pointed to the house when he spoke."

"Insolent scoundrel! ah! he'll have a fall some day."

"Why, there's Cantelupe, I declare," said Goodrick, as a young fellow on horseback suddenly darted round the corner of the Lodge road, and cantered towards Fontford.

It was;—a thrill of jealousy shot through Beauflower's heart. It was Amy's half-holiday, and Cantelupe was going over to Fontford to see her. Oh! the agony of those moments, when the invisible sword pierces, to the severing of soul and spirit; when from such invisible but gaping wounds life seems streaming and all joy and hope pass with it. To the baser jealousy of mean natures come rage and hatred; but to the gentler only unutterable sorrow, regret, and despair, and a burning eagerness to know the extreme of the hopelessness, and to be sure that for them

Love has closed Paradise for ever. Beauflower saw at once how hopeless was his rivalry with wealth and a title. Such are the glittering baits that catch women. Amy had, no doubt, heard of his embarrassments ; they were, perhaps, the general talk of the place. What right had he to hope for her ? He had saved her life. True, but his saving her life did not secure her love. He could not claim her as if it was his fee. Who would not have risked his life for her ? Perhaps, suggested a momentary hope, Cantelupe had only ridden over about the decorations. Perhaps he was not even thinking of Amy, and would return before she came. The Vicar's first impulse was to seize his hat, at once walk over to Fontford, and see by her manner, when they both met (she and Cantelupe), how far she loved him ; but no, he dreaded that : to see their eyes meet, and exchange glances, that would be intolerable, and he might betray himself, he who had no right to claim Amy's love, and who had never even spoken of love to her.

"He is jealous, I am sure he is. I am sure he is in love with Amy," thought Goodrick to himself, as he watched the Vicar from time to time over the edge of his paper ; "and well he may be." Presently the virtuoso got up to go.

"I shall go and have a chat with old Brown," he said, taking up his hat. "I want to hear

how that foolish young fellow is going on. Good-bye."

"You're to dine with us to-day, of course?"

"No, thank you. I've got old Robinson coming. I took advantage of that horrible Irishman being away at Shaftesbury, with his detestable champagne. I like chatting about pictures with the old fellow."

Troubles were falling thick on Beauflower. That morning's post had brought him another letter from the Oxford solicitor, claiming two more sums of money. One bill of 22*l.* 10*s.* 6*d.* for scarlet hunting coats and other folly; and another of 17*l.* 4*s.* 2*d.* for books. Both of these sums Beauflower distinctly remembered paying; he found, indeed, memoranda in an old Oxford pocket-book of their payment; but for the receipts he looked in vain. In his old thoughtless days he had tossed them away, or placed them in a book, or in some undiscoverable corner of a desk, or writing case. They could nowhere be found. There was another large deduction from the 175*l.* of the next July. This sordid care was pressing his life out, and now jealousy also had come to rack his heart.

He would walk in the spring woods and try to forget some of these overwhelming troubles. The ripples of the lake would efface them, the

birds' songs lure Hope back again from the far sky. The widening leaves should be his books, and there he would read of the joy of existence, and of God's goodness.

So he went, taking a by-path on the other side of the lake, straight (as if a lode star attracted him) to those steps where he had seen Amy fishing that October afternoon, when Love waited for him beside the water. There they were, bare and lonely now ; no red leaves blown into one corner ; no yellow leaves floating on the water ; but the glutinous chestnut buds were opening freshly, and the beech boughs were tinged with April green. Some wood violets, lingering from March, bloomed there among the mossy growth at the edge of the covert. The water reeds were rising with their green blades flat and sharp, and the wood-pigeon was dwelling soothingly on his monotone of love. Gradually the cloud seemed to lift, the black roof of care's tomb in which he had been self-immured, to turn from marble into vapour ; his heart grew lighter, and he began to walk with a freer and more vigorous step.

At the head of the lake there was a path across a dam which had small flood-gates, that could be opened when the water rose too high. It was a pretty spot, with its little bridge of rustic wood-work, above an artificial fall of some twenty

feet ; below the water streamed over stonework, built in steps, in a broad sheet of sounding foam ; or, at times when the gates were shut, in a thin transparent rippling veil, struck golden here and there when the sunbeams glanced athwart its woof. There were birch trees all round the place, and an ash or two, and their green reflections in summer time gave the spot an aspect of beauty, and pleasantly dappled the light and shadow that chequered it.

Beauflower ascended to the La Sonnambula sort of bridge, and looked down. The water was frothing white in playful anger, and churning up the pool below, over which some alder trees hung, sheltering the stream till it joined the brook that murmured under the woods in the little valley that lay between Summerleas and Slobury.

Sometimes there would be a patient fisherman down by the pool, a farmer's boy, an old man from the nearest village, beguiling an hour while waiting for a meal, or a keeper setting his night lines. But there was no one now. In his present mood Beauflower seemed to feel himself alone—the last man left in the world. He passed across the bridge, and went round by a stile into the swampy field, down the lower bank of which lay the stream. The ground was so irregular that

he could not see the pool till he reached the edge of the bank. He looked, and to his surprise—almost alarm—he saw a woman standing on the edge of the stream, at the very foot of the waterfall, and with her back towards him. It was Amy! His heart seemed suddenly to stop. Then there had been no pre-arranged meeting? she did not know that Cantelupe had ridden over to Fontford to see her. Perhaps then she might not altogether love him. A ray of hope darted across his path, and lit the road as he ran down the bank to where she stood.

Amy was so wrapped in thought, however, and the waterfall was so loud, that she did not hear his steps. She did not even turn, but stood there watching the bubbles as they sailed past and broke when they reached the calmer water. She was startled when he advanced, but instantly recovered herself, and offered her hand.

“I really did not hear you,” she said, with a voice as musical as the birds on the bough over their heads, “the water is so loud. Ethel and Miss Chivers have just gone to see a poor woman over there in the orchard; a wife of one of Farmer Brown’s men, her baby is very ill.”

“I looked down from the bridge and saw no one, so when I came round and found you, I really thought it was the Lady of the Lake. I expected

every moment you would disappear into the waterfall."

"I was thinking," Amy said, "of Tennyson's lines about the Brook,—though that is a different sort of brook ; the brook of a more open country and meadows, not a little stealthy half hidden stream under a wood like this."

"Do you feel quite strong again now ?"

"Yes, thank you, almost. Oh, how can I ever thank you enough for your courage in risking your life to save me ?"

"How ? Why, by sometimes thinking of me."

"I do. How ungrateful I should be if I did not!"

There was a silence.

"I feel," Amy continued, looking steadily at the water, "that I must leave dear Wiltshire some day, so I'm wanting to draw some of these scenes from memory, and recall them when I am gone."

"They will lose half their beauty when you go. Let me help you up this bank, it is so very steep." Amy took his hand and clambered.

"Papa says I should do very well for a foreground figure if I would only wear more red and blue. He'll be wondering I didn't come, but I'm going to walk back presently with Miss Chivers when we've been to see the poor crippled boy at the blacksmith's."

“And will not some one else wonder?”

“Some one else? What, Major Donovan? Whom do you mean? No one expects me but papa and mamma; the major is gone to Shaftesbury to-day.”

“And you never see any other visitor?”

“Oh, yes, that dreadful Mr. Bassevi, sometimes.”

“And never Mr. Cantelupe?”

Amy quailed slightly,—but very slightly; perhaps she resented the mode of interrogation.

“Oh, yes, sometimes Mr. Cantelupe. He is very kind to papa, and takes a great interest in his pictures. I like him because he is so kind to papa.”

“And only for that?”

“Yes, only for that.”

“You do not love him then?”

Beauflower had stopped, as he said this, on the ridge over the waterfall, and still held Amy's hand, though his assistance was no longer needed.

“No.”

“You are sure?”

“Yes, I am sure. But why do you ask? Does Julia think I'm in love with Mr. Cantelupe?”

Just at this moment, Miss Chivers and Ethel appeared at the door of the cottage in the orchard, and began to descend the meadow.

The Vicar, in that mood of jealousy, was unwilling to meet them.

"No, Julia has said nothing on the subject."

"Please tell her from me that I'm going on Monday, the day we meet at Miss Chivers's, to sketch the ruin, if she will call for me about six, on her way; but won't you wait and see Miss Chivers and Ethel?"

"No, thank you, I must hurry off. I have got to go over to Birdbrook with Julia, and she'll be waiting. Good-bye, Amy—may I call you Amy, Miss Robinson?"

"Yes, please do."

Miss Chivers caught a glimpse of Beauflower as he passed over the stile into the park, and her only remark was "So, so." Ethel said, "How funny of Mr. Beauflower not waiting to speak to us."

At the turn into the park, Beauflower overtook a pleasant, portly, sturdy friend, the rector of Birdbrook, who instantly plunged into a conversation about the Chetwynd dilapidations.

Travers, who stood at the lodge door as they passed, touched his hat with his usual half insolent civility, and hoped the little varmint was no worse for his accident.

"Who is that man?"

"A game-keeper?" said the Vicar.

“I never saw such an unpleasing fellow. I wouldn’t keep a servant like that two days.”

“It is Mr. Harker’s head-keeper,” said Beauflower, “a very bullying, tyrannical, disagreeable fellow. No one likes him. That dog he had the impudence to ask after, one of his keepers the other day shot at and wounded, by his orders I feel sure.”

“If it had been my dog,” said the choleric rector of Birdbrook, “I’d have prosecuted the rascal.”

CHAPTER XVII.

ON SUFFERANCE.

MRS. HARKER and her two daughters had gone to dinner and a child's party at Lady Mazagan's. Lord Mazagan had naturally been called to London to attend a club conspiracy of the Whig party. Mr. Harker had Bibury election business which detained him at home, in other words he was not in the humour for society, and he preferred brooding over his darker schemes at home, the more especially as young Cantelupe had just borrowed three thousand pounds more—this made the fifth mortgage on the Swallowcliff property—to defray the expenses at what, some veracious gentleman of entirely unbiassed party feeling—that is, the *other* party feeling—had called in the House of Commons, “the purest and most stainless borough in the whole circuit of Great Britain.” It is indeed surprising how expensive disinterested electioneering friends are; singular, too, how the price of beer and sandwiches goes up in the

barometer when political excitement, and the desire for legitimate reform, have increased the hunger and thirst of stainless, pure, and enlightened voters. "Three thousand, at so much a head, would just meet it," Messrs. Fox & Shekell had told the young "plunger" who calculated that Immenschikoff's certain victory at the Slobury races in the ensuing season would recoup him, as city men say in their expressive English, three times over. It was the bearing of Cantelupe's probable political victory at Bibury, and the prospects of his ultimately becoming his son-in-law, that Mr. Harker wished that night to hammer out upon his mental anvil. There was also another subject to be that night thrown into the seething furnace of his restless brain, and that was some way, by force or persuasion, to get rid of that terrible incubus on all possible power and happiness, Travers. The thought burnt inextinguishably as Greek fire in the mind of that strong and evil spirit. In some way, though heaven and earth were wracked, it must be done. Harker's iron will, turned to steel by ceaseless and almost unbroken success (for, though a great speculator, his bark had ridden out the storm when even the Robsons and Redpaths had foundered) made him regard an obstacle apparently so petty, but really so insuperable, with the suppressed fury of a

madman who broods over escape either by his own death, or by that of those who detain him. Sometimes, even in his dreams lately, by gleams of the lower fires, wild and terrible suggestions had haunted him, thoughts of subtle poisons, that modern science almost daily discovers and hides away in dark corners of its laboratory, trembling at the dark discoveries it has made ; strange undiscovered crimes read of long ago—forgotten long ago, he had thought—occurred to him again, and passed before his eyes, written in letters of fire. Newspaper paragraphs about strange deaths never accounted for, and now unheeded by purblind justice, so wise, so imbecile, rose into his memory as wild, deformed, and nameless creatures show themselves for a moment and startle voyagers in newly discovered oceans. Did the men who perpetrated those crimes—for some of these unaccounted-for deaths must have been crimes—were they haunting the world with consciences seared as with a hot iron, as the priests, who live by the religion they preach, argue. No, he sneeringly thought. No ; they were men one daily met, happy as life's limitations would allow, sorry for the past inevitable violence, thinking of it half regretfully, perhaps, at times ; otherwise not at all ; dangerous logic, stolen from Satan's theology, and headed in such Jesuit

codes as Escobar's, "Doing evil that good may come."

Meditating on these dark subjects, Mr. Harker, about half-an-hour before his lonely seven o'clock dinner, rode up the deep sunk miry lane (deep and miry as the groove of that one tyrannous thought) that led from Farmer Brown's end of Summer-leas, towards the Upper Down and Danegrove fir wood. Harker was on an old, safe, ambling cob, that he saved for such purpose a few years longer from the hounds, and he carried before him, on his saddle, a short double-barrelled gun, so that he might, when he got to the fir wood, dismount, tie up his horse, and get a few shots at rabbits just at their feeding time. The ride would take his mind away from those oppressive thoughts, and pass the hour or so before dinner very pleasantly, for, like many other wiser men, Harker hated the fuss, parade, and butchery of the modern battue. Two smooth terriers, black as night, except for their tan feet, ran at his horse's heels, just near enough to render the constant escape from having their little brains knocked out, a ceaseless and untiring excitement and miracle. Tradesmen's carts had passed for the day, carriages were not yet preparing to take their luxurious owners to outlying dinner-parties, the tired labourers had not yet left the turnip fields and the young corn.

The children were gathered in from the lane, hedges, and rick-yards, to their noisy tea. There was not even a mouse stirring in the village.

But Harker soon passed the intermittent rows of lichened stone houses, and the last cottager's garden, and got into a part where the lane grew more open, and the hedges lower. On one side spread Farmer Brown's high fields, on the other the green slopes of his own. Lonely slopes they were now, with no men at work upon them, mere reaches of quickening herbage, brown ridges of fallow and rank rye grass, on which penned sheep were bleating discontentedly. In one meadow alone there were more signs of life, for crows were strutting and pecking, busy as gold diggers at a new find, and waited on by a restless flock of starlings, who now and then rose in a frightened way, turned in the air with a glimmer of prismatic colour, and settled again to their fitful evening meal.

Then, by one of the pleasant kaleidoscopic changes of a country ride—Wiltshire ought to be a county of centaurs and centauresses—the scene changed. The long lane debouched on the wild open down, not far from an old lichen-blotted stone that had steadily asserted one fact, year after year, *i.e.*, that it was ninety-two miles from that spot to London. The lane here, like a tributary

brook, flowed into the great river of the high road from Salisbury to Warminster. Thirty miles of down stretched in the sunset, to the right and to the left. Old Roman cattle paths seamed the virgin turf with deep green lines. Chalky ruts marked the by-roads for carts and horses to Birdbrook, Wiley, and Winterbourne. At the foot of Danegrove Wood, that bounded the near horizon and crowned the down northward with its serried column of erect trees in close dark phalanx, spread a rolling lawn of chalk down, the old bed of a forgotten and nameless primæval ocean, now virgin waste land, ignorant of any plough, unconscious of any spade. Nature had busily scattered over it, as over all neglected places, the thistle, Adam's curse. Prickly, stubborn thorn bushes grew there in surly clumps, surrounded at the roots with dead grass, primroses, and violet plants. The ground in the hollows was rough with ant-hills that kindly time, that heals all wounds, had padded and rounded with turf.

Even Harker, as the plovers uttered their wild plaintive cries overhead, could not help pulling up his horse on the highest ground, where a chalky by-road led over a ridge and through a wood, to Codford, to look at the great blue chart of enchanted distance spread out before him

There was here and there, far below (for Wiltshire Downs are not flat plains, but rolling prairies, on very high plateaus,) a little village, so small that a giant might have spread it like so many toy houses on his open hand, clustering round a church, whose little spire raised its hand to heaven, and ceaselessly supplicated for the inmates. Far, far away, cutting the pale blue line of the horizon, there rose a little grey needle—that was the beautiful spire of Salisbury Cathedral.

In and out among the leafing thorn bushes, where the rabbits darted, like truant children at the sight of a dreaded schoolmaster, and between the bushes, tufted here and there with tolls of wool, roughly snatched from sheep seeking their churlish shelter, Mr. Harker rode into Danegrove Wood, intending to tie up his horse at Woodbine, a little cottage where one of the married keepers lived.

The dim wood, so silent and so odorous, derived its name from a tumulus (Danish, the local tradition went) that stood in a centre opening among the trees, and had been left when the firs had been planted, some thirty years before. It was a mere round mamelon, once ten or twelve feet high, now worn almost level by centuries of rain, and frost, and snow. It was the grave, the story

went, of some Danish champion, who died in a mortal fight with a giant, one of whose hands (now to vulgar eyes a mere block of stone chapped into five deep shapeless clefts,) protruded from the down some ten miles further on, within sight of the rampart of the great Roman camp which rises near Stonehenge.

It would have been very silent in the wood except for the untiring music that poured from the throbbing throat of a thrush some three ranks deep in the firs, and that would not cease even when Mr. Harker dismounted and loaded his double-barrel gun, with rattle of brass-bound ramrod, click of shot-pouch, and snap of powder-horn. The bird was as resolutely happy as honest Mark Tapley. It was happy with the profound happiness of innocence, youth, and love, and it sang on heedless of sorrow.

Mr. Harker remounted, and rode up one of the glades to the left of the keeper's cottage and leading to that central ride where he hoped to get half-a-dozen chances. He had trained the old shooting cob to bear fire, and to follow him with the bridle upon its neck. It did so now. Suddenly, where the cover was thick and dark with the pale rags of last year's beech-leaves, the two dogs darted off, but gave no tongue and started no game. In an instant they returned

to Mr. Harker's heels, smiling (for dogs can both smile and laugh), and wagging their tails.

"What is it, Watchbox?—what is it, Tiny?" said Mr. Harker, questioning, "he's in there, have him out—what is it, dogs?"

"This is what it is," said a voice, as the head-keeper Travers pushed roughly through the bushes, his gun under his arm. "It's me; how do you do, sir?"

"What business have you idling here. Have I not warned you not to visit that keeper's daughter. Her mother complains to me of your trying to decoy the girl from her sweetheart. You'll drive me to dismiss you now. Don't you imagine your threats alarm me; my lawyer will soon dispose of your claims, if you were to drive me to recover money extorted by intimidation. Take care, my fine fellow, you take care; your bluster won't go down with me. You're idling here."

The keeper's eyes darted sudden death at those of his enemy, which were compressed like a cat's with rage, and suffused with blood.

"You know best," said Travers, insolently tossing his gun with careless skill to the right from the left shoulder, "you know best, Mr. Harker, whether my silence is worth buying. If I told the thing I should have pleasure, now I have

money—it's all one whichever way the cards fall."

"I thought," said Harker, with a rage only restrained by some violent internal effort, "that I had desired that exactly at a quarter-past seven every evening, when the keepers had taken their stations for the night, you were to go your rounds, beginning at the Terraces and ending at the Low Ridge potteries."

"You did, and I've never broke the rule twice before, but I had a message to-day from a son of mine at Lord Portsmouth's, who is living in the same place where Farmer Brown's shepherd's son lives, and I promised to bring the boy's message here to the old woman; he wants to get the girl, his sister, as housemaid in the village. It is a lie, whoever says it, that I come after the girl. People only say so to make my wife jealous."

"Now mind me, Travers, and mind me without shuffling; if I catch you here again off you go, and you can do your worst. You shall rot away, fellow, if I once throw you off."

"Throw away," said Travers, with an aggravating horse laugh, "throw away, my hearty. You'll be sorry for it. I know the checkmate, as good as a story-book that. I've got you in, my gentleman, and I'm not going to be bounced out of the game. What made you drop that

pheasant business? The figures weren't quite square, were they?"

"I've given you warning, mind."

"Yes, in course you have, in course you have, and wished, no doubt, it could be a warning in a double sense, but I'll just speak plain and tell you why you didn't do anything disagreeable, and what is more, why you never will!"

"Why?" asked Harker, with clenched teeth, his gun shaking with the ague of rage that shook him. "Why, d—— you, why?"

"For this very simple reason among others," said the keeper, with a calmness that exasperated his opponent almost into madness, "for this very—simple—reason—*because you are only master here on sufferance.*"

For a moment Travers drew back and seized his gun. To judge by his stare, and the way the cold dew of passion broke out upon his upper lip, Mr. Harker was going to either club his gun and rush on his enemy, or discharge both barrels in his face. His fingers stole towards the trigger, they rested on it, but by a great effort he lifted the gun, discharged it twice in the air, then sprang upon his horse and rode cursing out of the wood.

"By the Lord Harry, that was as near as a toucher," thought Travers to himself, as he burst

into a neighing laugh that goaded his master on his way back to Summerleas. "I really thought for a moment he was going to let me have 'em, the fellow is a cur, and he was afraid to fire—he knows he'd soon swung for it if he had floored me; by the Lord Harry, if he had missed me I'd have shot one of his arms off in return, by all that's sacred I would, as soon as looked at him. If he'd died before any one came I'd have called it a gun accident, I could soon have burst the barrel, and put it near him; or may be, when my blood was up, if hadn't been mortal hurt, I'd have shot him straightway as if he'd been a stoat or a wizzil—but the cur was afraid—he always has been afraid of me."

There were two voices that spoke to Harker as he rode furiously back to the Abbey. The one voice from the dark shadow was sneering and defiant, and spoke in the tones of Travers; "on sufferance," it kept chiming like a peal of harsh bells. "You are only master of these lands on sufferance—on sufferance, only here on sufferance," and the bitter words ate into his soul as the etcher's acid eats into the copper. The other lower voice kept repeating, low and monotonous as a passing bell, only two words, "Kill him, KILL HIM!"

The sunset was fringing the western down with radiant lights of crimson and golden orange.

Every thorn tree Harker passed glowed like the burning bush that Moses saw on Horeb, but the man with one thought holding him in its death lock had no eyes for nature ; wherever he rode the turf seemed crimson ; blood sprang from the roadside pools wherever his horse's hoofs struck ; the young leaves of the trees over his head were dripping gore ; the very plovers, that with the selfishness of love thought every passer-by was looking for their young, gleamed red as the vultures on an Indian battle-field. The sky over Travers's house, as the rider darted through the hollow archway, spread in one broad sheet of crimson. His thoughts were of blood, and those Satanic promptings lent their colour to all he saw.

“Only on sufferance,” still the one voice in his brain said ; “Kill him, kill him,” tolled the other, from the shadow that dogged him to his own door ; and, indeed, did not leave him even there.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE JACOBEOAN RUIN.

THE Vicar's half-year's income was nearly gone, it wanted two months to the next payment of tithes, and what he had left did not nearly cover the subscriptions spent from the Chetwynd Dilapidation money, that would have to be paid in May, with no more escape from the demand than from that of any other exacting debtor. Where to turn? no avenue open, no hand stretched out with money, north, south, east, or west. Even to a case-hardened man, accustomed to every turn and winding on the way to the whitewash court (that covers but does not efface the moral stains,) the prospect would have looked rather threatening, but to a chivalrous, high-spirited man, of Beauflower's proud sensitiveness, it was maddening. Yet throw from him the Nessus robe, rend the net, he could not, struggle as he might. The miserable resource of living on credit (as far as he could), availed him little with those blood-

leeches who drained his life's blood. And amid these storms Love had to nestle with its opening blossoms, to which summer seemed now for ever denied. It is a terrible sight to see Hope crushed and lost in any one, but ten times sadder when Care selects a young heart to stab with its poisoned arrows.

Yet youth and age have both their ways of blunting sorrow's shaft. Age recalls former changes of fortune, and feels the disarming torpor of callousness. Youth, by elastic efforts, often leaps over sorrow's prison walls, and grants itself a day's rule brightened by dreams of blue sky and gleams of hopeful light. Love, too, the great enchanter, sent the Vicar moments when, in the possibility of Amy's affection, he forgot all but the present, the bliss of the mere chance of seeing her. Such a hope her words at the waterfall had given him. His presence could not be unpleasing to her, or she would not have looked so like one of Raphael's saints, when his face had assumed an eager desire to meet her at the ruin. It was one of the special charms of Amy, that it was impossible to associate a thought of her with even the venial deceptions of a girlish coquetry, often only the natural armour of woman's timidity and reserve. Yet she had not positively said she would be there—only that it was possible, if the evening was fine

—so do lovers, over love's rose leaves, strew their own beds with thorns.

In the full flush of a brave life's ante-meridian, in vain the Vicar struggled to console himself with a thousand palliating and sanguine anticipations. It was only to live a little closer for a year or so, to take pupils again, to write some great religious work that would be a synopsis of all the biblical critics, with an antidote to every sceptical sneer, or small arithmetical quibble. He had talent and industry, and there was that one hope, the lodestone of his life, his angel Amy to cheer him on.

He and his mother, and Julia, had been invited to tea at Miss Chivers', to meet the Robinsons, Dr. Briscoe, Mr. Goodrick, and the outrageous major, who, when properly diluted by other people, was by no means unbearable, if he could be kept from the one subject of the merits of the Charlemagne champagne. The Beauflowers had dined early at the Vicarage, and were going to take the field-way to Fontford, pick up Amy, who was sketching the ruins of the old Jacobean manor-house, and convoy her to the party.

Tea was to be at half-past seven. At twenty minutes past six (Miss Chivers had begged every one to come early, and not try which should be the most fashionable and the latest), the Beau-

flowers started ; for being honest, sincere, and unsophisticated as the good old maid herself, they believed what she said. It was one of those delicious days of early June, about an hour before sunset, when the year seems in the very voluptuous meridian of its charms. The young leaves, past their early callow, half-unfolded stage, were still so tender and transparent, that the sunlight passed through their thin-veined emerald surfaces, and cast fairy-like shadows, that were only sunlight softly coloured. The hedges, little tangled Paradises, rich with every variety of form and colour, were in the full flush of their luxurious beauty, and on every bough the birds sang their vespers, with the childish carelessness of young choristers. Only darkness could stay their singing ; and with the first star they would sink one by one to sleep, like children tired of play. A delicious balmy summer warmth, compounded of many odours, filled the air, and over all the tranquillity of evening was slowly spreading as the shadows lengthened and slowly overpowered the light. The only sounds, except the rejoicing singing of the birds from meadow to meadow, were the mellow tinklings of sheep-bell, or the lowing of the cows, as shouting boys drove them homeward. Now and then the children playing on the village-green gave a

long exulting cry, but gradually that noise, too, ceased.

“Ain’t you glad you came, mamma,” said Julia; “what a delicious evening. I do not think the most miserable person in the world could feel unhappy here.”

Poor Julia; she little knew from what recent struggles with the *pieuvre* her brother had come.

The Vicar quoted George Herbert’s fine lines—

“Sweet day! so cool, so calm, so bright,
The bridal of the earth and sky,
The dew shall weep thy fall to-night,
For thou must die.”

“It’s all very well,” said Mrs. Beauflower; “but, Julia, I really don’t think it safe leaving those servants. Suppose some tramp were to come to the door and ask for Ned, that Mary would show him into the drawing-room with the silver ink-stand, in a moment; and then, when we found it gone, all she would say would be ‘why, who’d have thought it!’ I tell you, Julia, there is not one of them to be trusted. They are all alike.”

It is not improbable that the worthy old lady would have continued this jeremiad over servants and their faults until they had reached Fontford, had not they just then reached the labourers’ cottages, through whose gardens ran the by-road that led down to the moated ruin.

"I really cannot go all that way," said Mrs. Beauflower. "You leave me here, Julia, at Mrs. Hacker's. I want to speak to her about some mending, and you and Ned can go for Amy, and bring her back to me here. I want to give the daughter a speaking-to about that last darning."

"Poor girl!" said the Vicar, laughing.

The path lay through an outlying bit of the farmyard, past some sheds where rusty harrows and ploughs were waiting for work. Above the orange and mossy tiles of the sheds rose the shapeless walls of the old manor house, muffled in ivy, that alternately bound together and wrenched open the blocks of crumbling stone. In the old bed-rooms the bat now waited for the darkness which it loves, and the white owl sat wisely over its ugly brats, talking to them sagely of mice and men.

The Vicar unlatched the old shaky paintless door that led into the farmer's garden, and approached the ruined porch. Amy was sitting before it, busily sketching. She rose when she saw them, shook them by the hand and greeted them with her own sweet smile. Beauflower thought he had never seen Amy look so beautiful as she sat there beside a rose-bush in full flower, that had shed several of its leaves, as if in

playful homage, upon her drawing-board, which stood on a light portable easel which Mr. Lawson, under Mr. Robinson's supervision, had constructed for her. The surprise of their sudden appearance, or the warmth of the fine evening, had slightly flushed her cheek, and gave it an indescribable charm that the evening light rendered still more radiant. She hardly looked up at the Vicar, but instantly resumed her work, talking with them, as her pencil moved over the paper.

The porch was a fine bit of Jacobean architecture, and time had passed it by with a lenient and loving hand. The entrance pillars were still entire with all those "strap" ornaments that seemed borrowed from embossed leather. The inner seats where old Shallows, young Slenders, and pretty Anne Pages, may once have sat, and laughed, and gossipped, were still entire. The slanting stone roof, rising to a point, still kept out the rain from the threshold, and on the left of the entrance there still remained the broad, square, mullioned Tudor window, through which merry Mercutios, long since grave, and fuming Benedicts long since quiet in the family vault, had looked and greeted Beatrices and Juliets many a thousand times.

Amy had made a very intelligent, careful drawing of the spot, highly realistic, without any of those mannered spotty touches of Prout, or

those conventional mannerisms of Harding, that drawing-masters, who love mediocrity, so carefully inculcate.

"Tell me frankly, if you like Amy's drawing," said Julia, leaning over the easel; "but I'm afraid, Amy, he will only flatter you."

"No, you mustn't flatter," said Amy, still not looking up; "but tell me all the faults. Papa is too lenient with me, I know, mamma never sees any fault in what I do, and as for the dear old major, he knows nothing about art, and hardly distinguishes a straight line from a crooked one."

"I will be frank," said Beauflower, in a voice softer and deeper than usual, though he was not conscious of that, "and call the window mullions a little too massive. You give the effect, but not the exact fact. Turner used to heighten his mountains purposely, to make them appear in the drawing as preponderating as they were in nature; but for my own part, I think rigid truth is the real principle. Draw truth, and it will look truth. Don't you think so, Miss Robinson?"

"Oh yes, I do; but I assure you, you have found more in my poor drawing than I intended. I see, too, now, I have made the transoms wider than the mullions, and they are not so. I have looked at them so long that I suppose I have lost a sense of

the relative size. Will you show me what you think the true width ? ”

The Vicar consented instantly, and soon reduced the window to its proper dimensions.

“ That’s beautiful, Ned,” said Julia, “ it only wants one thing now, some figures sitting in the porch.”

“ Yes, two old women, Julia, knitting, and telling stories of former days,” said Amy, “ or some children making daisy chains.”

“ Old women ? nonsense, Amy ; lovers ! Two lovers watching the first star rise. Oh ! how curious ! Look, Ned ! look, Amy ! there is the first star, I declare, sparkling over that tall elm ! We’ve got the star, now we only want the lovers. Ned, draw the major holding a skein of silk for Amy ; that’ll do.”

Wicked Julia ! Was her own heart so untouched that she could sport with the dangerous deity, perhaps even then in ambush somewhere among the ruins.

“ The major ? Don’t talk nonsense, Julia,” said Amy. Then there was a silence, as the Vicar grew as intent over his work as Amy was over the faults that his quick, skilful hand corrected.

“ Well, as you two people are so stupid, and so absorbed in your drawing, and two is company, and three is none ; and, moreover, as mamma will

be tired of waiting, I'll leave you now, Ned, to bring on Amy. You know your way. That star will guide you. What is the name of that star, Ned?"

"I shan't tell you, Ju, you torment. You know as well as I do. Oh! I pity the poor man who is some day to be tied to you. You'll want a tight hand, my young lady. Won't she, Miss Robinson?"

"Oh, no!" said Amy, rising and kissing Julia, as a mother does a child that has been hurt. "It will be easy to lead her by love, but she wouldn't be driven."

"Beatrice with her wits gone, Amy, that is what this gallant brother of mine is polite enough to sometimes call me, and I call him Romeo in orders; because he is always in love with some one or other."

"Now, that is a gross slander. I don't fall in love at all; and when I do, I shall never change. It is Juliet is the weathercock, always seeing some wonderful fairy prince ride by; but the prince never stops for his princess."

"Now, that is a wicked story, Amy. I never think about fairy princes at all. I never mean to marry."

"Not till you are asked."

"Impertinence! Isn't he rude, Amy. You wouldn't have thought he could be so rude; so

soft as he can speak to some people. Well, good-bye, Amy. I must be off. You'll be there nearly as soon as we are, I dare say. We shall walk slow; but don't you hurry till you have settled that interesting question of the exact width of the window sills."

"Well, it is very important, Ju. Oh! do, do wait for us. It'll be done directly. It will be so much pleasanter walking all together, and I want to consult about that new dress of mine. Oh, how cruel you are, Ju. Don't go."

"A summer evening's walk is much better with two than four, Ned says. Amy, good-bye. I'm gone."

A ringing silvery laugh, and the garden door closed upon the mischievous girl. How constrained they both grew at once, as Ned completed the drawing, as he thought, and then laughed at himself for having forgotten the left-hand mullion. The sun had set some little time, when there came the sound of a gun twice from the Terraces at a spot almost in a straight line, half a mile away from them. The echoes rolled crashing through the woods. Five minutes later two quick sharp shots, almost together, renewed the echoes; then there was a deep silence.

"What a grand echo!" said Amy.

"That's Travers on his rounds, he generally

gets a shot or two at the wood-pigeons as they're going to roost. They are his perquisites."

Then Beauflower alertly folded up the easel, and collected the drawing things, placed the drawing slanting against the porch, so that he might judge of the effect.

"How beautiful that star over the elm tree is now," said Amy, as they prepared to go.

Beauflower looked. Yes, there was Venus, slily peeping forth, with a clear keen sparkle, as if almost unconscious of her name.

"It is the star," he said, with a tremulous voice, "that guards true lovers, it looks on one now," then he turned to her suddenly, drew closer, his hand stole, unreprieved, around her waist, his passion burst forth. "Amy," he said, "I love you with the purest and deepest love. You are my thought now, night and day, Amy. Will you love me?"

Amy made no answer, but her head drooped a little; she drew closer and pressed his hand, only very gently; but the touch thrilled his blood.

"You do not love another; don't kill me by telling me that. You do not love Cantelupe? Oh! tell me, Amy."

"No. I love you."

"Then you will be mine?"

"I have promised to myself never to marry till my father's death, Mr. Beauflower."

“Call me Ned, dearest.”

“He is getting old, and he has had symptoms of paralysis, and if he were to die, or be unable to paint, mamma would only have her lodgings to depend upon. You must not ask me to break this sacred promise ; but I will love you for ever, and truly, Edward.”

Oh ! misery, to be shown Paradise, and then to have its golden gates barred upon you.

“You do not love me, Amy,” he said, “or you would love me better than father or mother.” Love is so selfish.

“Yes, I do love you dearly,—Ned. I have loved you ever since I awoke in the carriage after that terrible accident, and saw your sorrowful look as you bent over me, doubting whether life was not gone ; but you must not ask me to break my sacred vow, Edward. We can be all in all to each other, but not husband and wife yet.”

“But I will maintain your father and mother if the need come,” Beauflower was about to say, when he thought of the debt that was spreading its rank growth around him, and he was silent.

Then their lips met in the first long kiss of confessed love. That fair evening star never shone on truer lovers than those that then plighted troth ; but Amy held inexorably to her vow.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MAN WITH THE BEARD.

It was exactly ten minutes to seven of that very June evening that the Vicar and Amy learned the secret of each other's hearts beside the porch of the old Jacobean ruin, that one of Travers's children, a little girl of ten, with a basket on her arm, sent on a hurried errand to Birdbrook, in taking a short cut through the Abbey Woods, at the foot of the Terraces, saw, as she stopped for a moment and looked back through the bushes, a man, with a dark green coat and slouched dark wide-awake, steal up across a by-path in the direction of a small hut which the keepers, when on the watch, were in the habit of using at night, sleeping by turns there by the fire, and relieving each other like sentinels. The man did not see her, and she only saw him for a moment, but in that moment she observed that he had a long thick black beard, which hid all the lower part of his face, and that he carried

what seemed a short gun under his arm. The thought that he was a poacher struck her for a moment, and she felt rather frightened ; but she was too young to think about it for more than the instant, and only ran the faster along the little by-path, where the dry cones crackled under her feet, and the rabbits fled before her, more frightened than herself. Before she had got a hundred yards further, the cry of a white owl, mouse hunting in the twilight, occupied all her thoughts, and she forgot all about the man with the beard in her wonder whether the old woman at the Birdbrook general shop would give her more than four sweets for a halfpenny, and on she ran, singing a little song, happy in the boundless delights of the true golden age of life.

In the mean time the man with the beard, (the poacher rash and daring enough to brave Mr. Harker's keepers even before dark, or whatever the mysterious man might be,) stole cautiously—for his feet seemed to give no sound, except when a dry stick crackled under them—through the bushes, threading in and out between the hazels, brambles, and other underwood. He avoided any beaten track, however small, but threaded his way between the old birch trees and the sapling firs, and made with the certainty of one who knew every inch of the covert, for

that particular part of the Terraces about three quarters of a mile from Travers's lodge, where just inside the broken park wall, and looking down on the Fontford road, stood that round thatched hut of the keepers that we have before described. The narrow but well trodden path, along which Travers made his morning and nightly rounds, passed it at about twelve feet off. There was no door to the hut, but only a hurdle bound with furze bushes, which could be used as a temporary shelter from the wind without interrupting the passage of warning sounds. Some old straw lay in one corner of the hut—it had served for the keepers' bed; the ashes of a fire remained still in the small calcined grate, there was a torn card or two, a broken pipe, the case of a breech-loading cartridge, and some fluff from a rabbit skin, on the earth floor. The sun had just set; the June twilight had still that warm afterglow that twilights in June often have. The man with the beard cowered in the darkness inside the doorway of the hut, and waited as deerstalkers wait for the deer, in a defile. It was seven now, for as he listened and his eyes glared to himself in the twilight, he could hear the Abbey clock strike the hour with its sharp alert stroke. He took his double-barrelled gun, removed the caps, struck the breech to bring the powder

well forward, primed the nipples freely from a small powder-flask he drew from a side-pocket, then replaced the caps, pressed them home with his thumb, let down the hammers and re-cocked both barrels. There was all the thievish care of a poacher about the man, yet how could he expect to shoot pheasants at an hour past their feeding time and from inside a hut? He should look for them in their roosting places. Perhaps he was only waiting for his companions who had the nets and the sulphur.

Minutes seem hours, hours days, when one is waiting in fear or anxiety. Dozens of times the man with the beard looked at his watch; there was just light enough to see the figures dark against the glimmer of the dial. The sharp discharge of a gun, that sounded like the sudden blows of a hammer on an iron gate, aroused the watcher. It was Travers on his rounds. He had just seen the ivy rustle at the top of a tree, and knowing that that movement indicated a wood-pigeon, had fired and killed. Wood-pigeons were his perquisites. He was in the habit of killing them night and morning as he went his rounds. It was amusement combined with business. The shot had been discharged when he was not very far from the lodge. The watcher clutched his gun, and strained his eyes

to pierce the twilight. Was he afraid of being surprised before his companions could join him? Another five minutes, and a second gun went off, this time several hundred yards nearer, and a dog barked. That was a second pigeon shot.

Presently there came the sound of footsteps, and a tall gaunt form strode out of the dim wood, not a hundred yards from the hut, a dog preceding it. It was Travers, with his gun on his shoulder. He came walking sturdily and fast, with a swinging stride. He was muttering to himself and laughing.

"He was here on sufferance," he said, "I told him so. He found me too much for him. Threaten me?—I like that. He is my servant now. I'm the real master, he's only here on sufferance; he didn't like that. Ha! ha! What's the matter, Joe; come to heel, you beast."

But the old one eyed terrier was not to be pacified; growling and fretting, it had stopped sniffing within six feet of the hut, and now, with his nose down, was approaching the doorway with a short frightened bark.

"Come to heel, Joe," Travers cried, with a curse. "It's only a rabbit, I suppose. Come to heel, sir, or I'll teach you, my boy."

But the dog was barking very furiously. Travers stepped towards the hut, wondering what could

so disturb the dog. That moment a dark figure stepped forward and presented his gun. There were two jets of fire, and Travers fell, dashed back to the earth. Two heavy loads of buck shot had struck him full in the right side, his right lung was almost carried away. Another moment, the dark figure leaped forward, killed the dog that flew at him with a blow of the butt end of his gun, and stamped upon the dying man. Then, striking a fusee, he showed his face to the groaning wretch, who had but a moment to live.

"You know me now," he muttered, between his teeth; "don't die and tell them below it was a poacher who killed you. I told you to take care. You despised the warning."

Travers saw the face; stared at the distorted features lit up by the momentary flame; tried to speak; stretched his hand towards his gun; gave a deep gasping groan.—He was dead, in the very flush of his sins. The murderer stooped and touched the keeper's heart; it had stopped for ever. The murderer gave one wild look round, listened, and then leaped down among the bushes. The dead man was left alone in the darkness.

But only for a moment. The bushes had scarcely closed, like parting waves, upon the murderer, before they reopened before him.

"Fool that I was," he muttered, "I had for-

gotten,"—and stooping down by the dead man, he tore open his shooting jacket and felt in the breast pockets. He looked in three in vain ; there was nothing but some cartridges and a brandy flask. In the last he found a flat packet of letters, tied round with string. He struck a fusee with savage haste, tore off the string and looked at the letters. They were all there, all the damning testimony. The man was no poacher bent on revenge—it was Harker ! Now he was no longer master on sufferance ; the only possessor of his original secret was dead ; the doctor to whom it had been confided was dead ; and the villain who had used it as a means of extortion was dead. The master of Summerleas was safe for ever.

As he thrust the letters into his pocket, one of them fell ; he groped for it round the body in a delirium of fear, for that had come upon him now ; he could not find it. All at once his hand came upon it, wet with blood ; he seized it and fled. He took a well trod path this time, that would not betray his footsteps, avoided the dewy grass, struck into another part of the wood, where the owls were hooting as if to betray him, and stole down by a circuit of a mile into the shrubberies at the back of the Abbey. Then through them, quietly peering to see if any one was near or any sound

could be heard, he got into the gravel walk at the back of the house, close to the broad lighted window. All was still as death. He listened. He looked in—it was his study window. He could see at the edge of the blind the fire brightly burning just as he had left it; the chair as when he rose from it to bolt the door and stop the key hole only one short half hour ago. Then he softly pressed the tall French windows that opened on the lawn. They were open as he had left them. He entered, closed them, softly shot the bolts, and drew the curtains.

He recoiled horrified at the face that met him in the old-fashioned mirror over the mantelpiece: it was white, and wan, and wild. Then he threw open a cupboard, and drew out the suit of clothes he had taken off before he left. With the haste of a madman he tore off his false beard, his wideawake, his long paletot, his trowsers, and his boots, dropped them into the long enamelled tank of sulphuric acid that he had before thought of for this purpose, and resumed his usual dress. Then he cleaned his gun, put it up in its usual locked-up case, and covered the tank with its metal lid, which he also padlocked. In twelve hours those clothes would be reduced to a pulp. The fever of excitement carried him through all this with incredible speed. There is a sort of

horrible genius that crime gives a man for the moment, to enable him to do the works of hell more readily. Then he arranged his writing things at a desk, so that his back should be to the door when anyone should enter, took down a file of reference books, and arranged his lamp. It seemed like a dream already. Was he, the man in that quiet, meditative, luxurious room, with busts and pictures, the man who lurked in the hut and took that man's life, who knelt beside the shattered body, who drew out those papers, and who searched, in that moment of agonising fear, for the missing letter that might have betrayed all? He was faint now with the reaction from the excitement. He would unbolt the door and ring for some wine; he need only speak two or three words, and scarcely show his face. The sooner he was seen the better. But he would first peruse those letters before he burnt them. He lifted the paraffin candles on to the mantelpiece and stood up to read. As he was reading the first words of the old butler's confession, his eye glanced up at the mirror, and to his horror he saw that his right hand and one of the letters were stained dark with blood. He instantly thrust the papers into the fire, driving them deep among the hottest coals with the poker, then going to the washstand in his cupboard, one of those

basins with a tap and a plugged hole in the centre, washed off carefully every stain of accusing blood, and swilled the basin twenty or thirty times with water, examining every part where a stain could rest, either on the china or metal, with the intensest care. There was fear of man in this man's mind, but no remorse, no belief in God, no fear of the all-seeing Deity. "No," he said, "the man was my enemy as much as if he had tried to blow out my brains in open battle. He was always planning evil. There was no escape from him but by killing him, and I've done so, done it secretly and well, and I would do it again. I shall feel no remorse, for I'm safe now, safe and free, and no longer a master here *on sufferance*."

Then he went on with the acting of his dreadful part. He drew his chair to his desk, wrote a few incoherent lines, then unlocked the door, and rang the bell sharply. The butler came in a few minutes.

"Bring me some of the best Burgundy," he said, without looking round, and still poring over his writing, "and send me tea in here at half-past eight."

What he waited for and what he dreaded now was the first alarm of the murder. But wine would

give him nerve to bear it. Those clothes once destroyed, he was safe for ever. Everyone would think that Travers had been shot by some poachers in revenge. No possible clue could ever lead to him. No one knew of any disagreement between them, or any reason that he had to wish for his death.

It was still several hours before his wife and daughters could return, and every moment brought back more of his self-possession. He was still drinking his wine in quick deep draughts, that roused but did not oppress his brain, when there came a long, shrill, agonising scream from the kitchen, another, and another, then there was a rush of frightened servants along the passage. The moment had come. He threw himself into his chair and resumed his pretended writing. The door flew open, and the butler, and two or two or three footmen and grooms rushed in.

"Oh sir, oh master, oh Mr. Harker," they cried, "Travers has been found dead on the Terrace, and they think he's been murdered by a poacher."

"Murdered! Good God, it is impossible," said Mr. Harker, "who found him? Gracious heavens, not murdered?"

"Paddy Blake found him, sir," said the butler, "he had brought some gin for one of the keepers,

and was going to wait for him in the hut, when he stumbled over the body. He ran to the stables and called the grooms out."

"This is indeed terrible. Poor Travers! Where is the body? I must see it. Get me my coat and hat, and a lantern, and come with me, Roberts."

"It's at the lodge, sir," said the butler, pale as a sheet. "Mrs. Travers has gone out of her mind, they think. She says she's sure it is a poacher. They had a grudge to him because he was so faithful to you."

"He was faithful. I told him not to be too rash, or to go about at night alone. Are the police sent for?"

"Yes, sir. Vincent is there by this time."

"And Dr. Briscoe?"

"Yes. We sent off one of the grooms directly the news came."

"Was anything stolen from the body?"

"Yes, the watch was gone, and the coat was torn open, and the breast pockets turned inside out. They've killed the dog, too."

"That looks like thieves; but poachers might rob him. Come, we must see the poor fellow, Roberts. This is a most horrible affair. Faithful fellow, and in my service. Wretches! I always said, have you not all heard me often

say, that any poacher would murder a man for half-a-crown."

"Ay, that I have, sir, many a time," said Roberts, and two-under footmen said also that they had.

"Other sins only speak ; murder shrieks out.
The element of water moistens the earth,
But blood flies upwards and bedews the heavens."

The village was already aroused, as one shriek arouses a sleeping house. From every door men, women, and children were hurrying to the lodge, where Dr. Briscoe had just arrived, driving at his utmost speed. The door, as Mr. Harker and the servants with lanterns approached it, was crowded by keepers, grooms, and villagers, all white and trembling. Travers's children were crying around their mother, who had swooned in the arms of some friend. Paddy Blake, wild and dishevelled as usual, stood outside the door, relating the discovery to Archer, Farmer Brown, and a crowd of open mouthed villagers.

As Mr. Harker entered, and every one respectfully made way for him, struck, even in their excitement, by his pale and troubled face, Dr. Briscoe met him, closing the door of the bedroom behind him as he spoke.

"This is a dreadful, dreadful affair, Mr. Harker,"

he said, "the poor fellow has been murdered, there is no doubt about it, murdered by poachers. His right lung is almost entirely shot away, he could not have lived three minutes. You had better not see the body ; it would do no good ; it would only very much shock you. No one had better see it. Mrs. Brown is going to take the poor widow home with her after she recovers, and the children too."

"I suppose, doctor," whispered Harker, "that this vagabond Paddy had no hand in it?"

"Oh no," said the doctor, "just look at him. Why, he's more sorry and more frightened than any one. No, it's one of those infernal poachers who have owed Travers a grudge. He was always a hard man."

"I suppose it *must* have been a poacher," said Mr. Harker, with a deep sigh, "and Mr. Archer here must spare no effort to bring the miscreant to justice."

"There shan't be none spared, sir," said P. C. Archer, "and I'll let the coroner know. I'll send directly to all the railway stations ten miles round, and have the wood searched all the way to Swallowcliff. When daylight comes, we shall see better if there was any struggle. I thought them poachers here were carrying on a little too fast, and I told

Travers only last week not to go about on the Terrace alone."

"I wish now," said Mr. Harker, "I had insisted on his having more men to watch, but it is too late now. Oh, this is a dreadful, dreadful affair indeed."

END OF VOL. II.

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